"Where is the Lord God of Elijah?"

E. K. COX

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By
ENOS KINCHELOE COX, D.D.

With Introduction by
BYRON HOOVER DEMENT, TH.D., D.D., LL.D.

CHICAGO
THE BIBLE INSTITUTE COLPORTAGE ASSOCIATION
843-845 North Wells Street

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Printed in the United States of America

INTRODUCTION

THE author of "WHERE IS THE LORD GOD OF ELIJAH?" is Rev. E. K. Cox, D. D., pastor of the First Baptist Church of Gloster, Miss., who has written a strong, passionate appeal, not merely to fill the fleeting hours with religious activities and to add one more volume to the many books of devotion, but to arouse the slumbering saints from their perilous lethargy and fan the dying embers of their zeal into a burning enthusiasm for righteousness and redemption.

The book is no accident in a busy pastor's life, but the product of a holy urge to sound forth a clarion call to the supreme duty and privilege of prayer in an age when the "Lord God of Elijah" is so flagrantly defied, rejected, ignored, and disobeyed. It comes from the pen and brain and heart of a successful pastor who grapples with the vital issues of the hour and writes in clear forcible English about the things of superlative worth in these days which try the souls of men and the patience of God.

The golden thread running through the book is the power and privilege of prayer; the profound need and marvelous achievements of intercession.

The author begins with a graphic description of the age in which we live and of the influences operating against the progress of Christian life and truth, and closes with "An Emergency Call" to bring the people of God together for thanksgiving, confession, and supplication that the tides of evil may be driven back and the waves

of salvation may sweep over our land in heavenly blessing.

The power of prayer in the life of Elijah, Jacob, Moses, Samuel, Hezekiah, Daniel and Jesus receives a new emphasis, and all who read with care this timely volume will feel as never before the sin of indifference, and the need and possibility of a spiritual awakening through the direct intervention of the Lord God of Elijah.

BYRON H. DEMENT.

The Baptist Bible Institute,
New Orleans, La.

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FOREWORD

THERE are times in the history of the church of God when it is necessary to re-study and re-emphasize certain great Bible truths. In the thinking of many of God's children, there is at the present hour an unusual need for prayer and supplication.

The purpose of this writing is to encourage prayer, and to that end the author has endeavored to draw some lessons from notable examples of prayer recorded in the Bible. We have also sought to make a brief study of some things which Jesus said about prayer, that our hearts might thrill anew at the mighty words of the Master Teacher.

There is no evidence that those whom the Bible records have immortalized by reporting the remarkable results of their praying, even suspected that they were doing anything out of the ordinary. No one would have been more astonished than they at the thought that after millenniums had passed, other men and women would seek to learn the secrets of their mighty deeds. But the story of their lives is so genuine, their experiences so thoroughly human, and their problems so like those which confront men of every age that they teem with an abiding interest. One of the proofs that men and women are, and always have been, interested in the way to God, is the force with which these stories have held their grip on the imagination of the race through the centuries.

One of our greatest sources of inspiration has ever been the study of great lives and their unusual achieve-

ments, and there is no history that we may study with greater profit than the record of these great hours at the mercy seat.

When a man has found God, he has made the greatest discovery possible to the mind and heart of our race; and he who has become an expert in the art of talking with God, has attained to the loftiest form of human speech.

The achievements of the closet are not found in any one stratum of human society; they are open alike to men and women in every walk of life. There is no royal highway to the treasury of God. It is easily found by "him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word" (Isa. 66: 2). Philosophers and sages have sought for the fabled stone with the golden touch, only to discover that simple souls untaught in earthly wisdom have become the savants of a nobler tutelage, and that the wise in the lore of the heart have learned the hidden way to coffers of exhaustless treasure.

It is our hope to spend a little time with these great specialists in this rarest of human arts, and to learn from the men who have brought the Infinite to the aid of the finite, and the things of eternity within the span of time. They will not teach us much about that in which the world is chiefly interested. They were not, many of them, wise in the wisdom of this world; but we may learn the price of victory, the cost of consecration, and the way into that purity of heart by which men see God.

E. K. C.

Chapter I

"WHERE IS THE LORD GOD OF ELIJAH?"

ELISHA was lonesome. He was also troubled. He had just seen his master, the heroic Elijah, swept away in God's whirlwind, escorted by the flaming attendants from the celestial world.

Elisha was going back to take up the unfinished task of battling against the vile worship of Baal and the evil influence of Ahab and Jezebel. He knew all about the forces arrayed against him. He thoroughly apprehended all the foul seductiveness of the worship of Ashtoreth, and he knew to the full all the weakness of Ahab and the fierce cruelty of Jezebel.

We can imagine him as he trudged along with bowed head, the old shaggy mantle of Elijah thrown over his arm, pondering the situation. What shall he do? Can he face the odds against him without Elijah? Has the power that brought victory at Carmel vanished with the fiery spirit of the old prophet? These must have been some of the questions that swept through the mind of this strong, quiet man who was trying to get his bearings for the coming conflict.

In a little while the waters of the Jordan rolled at his feet. The swift river must be crossed, and there was neither bridge nor ferry. Elisha seemed to feel that he had come to a good place to settle the matter, and sending up the cry that had been echoing in his soul, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" he smote the waters with the mantle of his departed master. The waters opened before his feet, and he walked dry-shod to the other side. The matter was

settled, and as Elisha strode like a conqueror into the midst of the sons of the prophets, they cried, "The spirit of Elijah doth rest upon Elisha."

The only question that Elisha had to settle was whether the God of Elijah was still with them. If the God who could answer was yet abiding in their midst, all else would take care of itself. He had found the answer. Elijah was gone, but Elijah's God was still the defense and refuge of His people.

At the present hour many of God's people are cast down and discouraged. The Elijahs are gone, the fires upon the altars of their Carmels are gone out, and the ashes of their sacrifices are cold. They see no fire coming down from heaven, but they hear the exultant shouts of the enemy, and see the temples of numberless false gods. The cowardice of Ahab and the audacity of Jezebel are yet abroad in the land.

Humanly speaking, God's people have cause for discouragement. There was never a time when so many people wore the name Christian, and never a time, when with far too many, the name meant less.

In every land and among people of every race are found Christian churches. There are thousands of organizations whose avowed purpose is to spread the gospel of Christ. Millions of money are being poured annually into their treasuries, and all the great machinery of church organizations grows apace. Great cathedrals and costly houses of worship dazzle our eyes and stir the wonder of the passerby; mighty throngs stream through their aisles every Sabbath; and yet there is a situation that chills the hearts of many of God's wisest servants. It is a good time to inquire, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?"

Let us briefly notice some of the dangers which threaten, that we may rightly apprehend the situation.

I. *We are confronted with seemingly overwhelming opposition.*

There are problems clamoring for solution that bewilder our wisest thinkers and most competent leaders. They are at their wits' end and stand appalled at the conditions about us.

We are in a period of unrest. Great social forces are heaving and tossing until they threaten the foundations of everything worth while. New and godless systems of social and economic life are rearing their heads, and boldly avowing their intent to destroy religion and wipe out the name of God among men.

Gigantic industrial conflicts loom upon every horizon, arraying class against class, and breeding hatred in millions of hearts. The fires of the World War still smolder, and the old jealousies and race hatreds are endeavoring to fan them into flame. Nations are baring their teeth, ready to spring at each other's throats.

The East has grown weary of being the field of exploitation for the Western Nations, and is arousing from its slumbers and muttering of wars of revenge. The yellow peoples are developing a race consciousness which resents the assumption of superiority on the part of the white man, and the listener hears the deep thunders which impend the coming storm.

There are great social evils that threaten not only the church, but the whole fabric of modern life. The rapid increase of wealth has brought the power of gratifying sensuous desires within the reach of greater numbers of people than ever before. All the forces which wealth and luxury have used to wreck every great civilization

of the past, are battering at the foundations of our present structure. The increase of wealth within the last few decades has been unprecedented in the history of man. The luxuries of yesterday have become the necessities of today. The average laboring man has sources of comfort and pleasure beyond that of reigning monarchs a few centuries ago. The task of Christianizing the mightiest commercialism that our race has ever known confronts us. Mammon and Christ are contending for the mastery of the market place, where Mammon, "the most beastly and ghastly of all the gods of idolatry," has ever been king. The wealth that is allied with ruthless greed, and selfish and sensuous pleasure is a thrice deadly foe to spiritual life and holy endeavor. We are threatened at every gate of our Christian temple by the unleashed forces that have been nourished in the degeneracy of unhallowed wealth.

The limits of this writing are too short to mention in detail the many ways in which religion is endangered by this hydra-headed ancestor of every sort of evil. The greed of gain holds nothing sacred. There is no sanctuary that it will not desecrate, no altar that it will not defile.

Under its domination, the stage and the movies have become greater factors in the shaping of life and character than at one time would have been thought possible. To say that they are not allies of righteousness is useless. We all know of the struggles of some of our great cities to curb the rottenness of a stage that is filthy and contented. It is a fact, too well known to be disputed, that the great mass of moving pictures are pandering to sensuality; that much of their exhibit is prurient sex stuff, prepared by specialists who are past masters in the art

of making virtue dull, drab and uninteresting, and vice thrilling, heroic and attractive.

We have a present-day literature, if it be lawful to call it a literature, which is far more to be dreaded than the combined effects of all the plagues of ancient Egypt. Scores of printing presses are pouring forth this class of books and magazines,—a very avalanche of filth, a plethora of pollution, such as has cursed no people since the dawn of time. It is superfluous to marshal statistics in support of this statement; any reader can verify it at the nearest large news stand.

The modern dance with its scanty dress upon the part of women, and the intimate familiarities which it fosters, and the vast numbers of almost nude men and women who throng our public bathing resorts, have borne their natural fruitage in the lowest standards of sex morality known during the Christian era. The rapidly increasing number of divorces, which is breaking up countless homes, is having its inevitable results, and is eating like a cancer at the vitals of our entire social organism.

Crime is rampant over the land,—cruel, beastly, revolting crime, that laughs at law and moral codes. In no period of modern life have we known the time when contempt for law was so great, and when the established rights of life and property were so ruthlessly trampled under foot. The sale of narcotics flourishes, while the traffic in intoxicants, in open violation of both constitutional and statutory law in America, is defended by thousands of respectable citizens, as well as by the thoughtless and criminal.

We are at death grip with the most subtle and dangerous philosophy that Christianity has ever encountered. The ancient theories which it overthrew never imagined

anything half so insidious and deadly. Modern rationalism, that creature of protean form and heathen ancestry, assails our faith at the very heart. The foundations of belief are threatened. The Bible is under fire, both from enemies without and traitors within. Nothing which we have learned to revere is sacred. This audacious foe would blot out faith in the deity of our Lord, destroy an inspired Bible, discredit all miracles, deny the efficacy of the atoning cross, take away the victory of the empty tomb, shadow the glory of the ascended Lord, and challenge the triumph of the returning King. This treacherous skepticism has broken into the holy of holies of our sanctuaries, and is robbing our worship of its devotion, and the message of our pulpits of their note of power. The question marks inserted by the apostles of unbelief are marring the work of our Christian schools, and the seeds of doubt germinate and find nourishment in many of the abodes of the sons of the prophets.

There can be no compromise with this baneful unbelief, for compromise upon the part of evangelical Christianity means death. The battle is not against "flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." All the foes are not without the citadel; many betrayers lurk within, ready to barter their spiritual birthright for the pottage of worldly applause, and betray the Master with a kiss for the thirty pieces of scholarly recognition.

Our great mission boards are burdened with debts, and the appeals of those who direct them are falling upon dull ears and careless hearts. There is a numbness, an inertia, a lethargy, that unless broken is a forerunner of spiritual death. With increasing material prosperity we

have grown selfish and lost our passion for the souls of men. We have grown in wealth, but not in liberality. The need of our people is not money, but the spirit that sees in money a power for the saving of souls and the honoring of our Christ. We need a fresh infusion of missionary zeal, an enduement of the Spirit, like that which made the church of the apostles a dynamo of evangelistic energy.

All these and many more obstacles confront us. They will not be overcome by the puny arm of flesh, nor by the devices of our own invention. Is it not time to cry with Elisha, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?"?

II. *It is also a time of known and confessed weakness.* We are not lacking in those who cry that the armor of God is worn out, that our age has outgrown the simple gospel of Christ, and that we need no longer expect the results and experiences of former years. These have surrendered to the enemy, and yielded before the giants and the walled cities in the modern Canaan.

The forms of religion remain the same, but the flame of holy zeal and burning ardor is lacking. We have much to say about service, but little about salvation. Many are shouting loudly about bringing in the kingdom, but they are thinking about better living conditions in the here and now, and not a reign of righteousness growing out of regenerate lives. Their object is to make men comfortable rather than holy, and they are bent upon creating a company of philanthropists rather than a communion of saints. We have much activity, but little power; many murmuring brooks, but no rushing torrents. Churches are filled with a broad catholicity of spirit, but there is little zeal for snatching brands from the burnings. They rather modestly doubt if there be any burnings. There are many

ministers, but few heralds of salvation; plenty of preachers, but few prophets of God.

The friendship of the world has ceased to be considered enmity to God. Worldliness has laid its cold, slimy hand upon the hearts of myriads of church members until it has stifled their activity and chilled all their enthusiasm. They prefer the dance, the card table, the vulgar show, the giddy round of sensual pleasures, to the house of worship and the hour of prayer. So many of our churches have yielded to the popular clamor, that the voice of protest is miserably weak. Sin of every sort stalks unabashed and unreproved into the courts of the Most High, and church discipline is numbered among the lost arts. The supreme hope of many religious organizations is to grow in power and increase their revenues, rather than to save men and build Christly character. Our churches have more feasting than fasting, and many more who make merry than who mourn over the weakness of Zion. We have lots of applause, with but little reverence; many services, but few converts. Our pews are crowded with multitudes seeking diversion, but our altars have a dearth of penitents crying, "God be merciful to me a sinner."

Our spiritual horizon may be wider than that of our fathers, and may find more varied forms of expression, but the most hearty optimist will hardly claim that our religious experiences have the same depth and intensity. The passionate longing for the souls of men, and the glowing fervor of the evangelist have almost vanished, and hosts of churches are becoming social centers rather than heralds of salvation.

Our missionary spirit is dwindling into a kindly philanthrophy and a laudable desire to see the poor heathen have the comforts and conveniences of Western civilization.

There is a persistent clamor that the gospel shall adapt itself to the spirit of the age, and not that the people of this age shall repent and believe the gospel. This means in reality a demand for another gospel. It is an insistent cry that evangelical faith shall commit suicide with an easy anesthesia.

The apostles and Christian workers of the first century did not attempt to fit the gospel into the latest modes of Grecian thought, or into the social life of the Roman cities; but they imperiously called them to repentance at the foot of the cross. The religion that does not summon the world to judgment before its holy demands and lofty standards has already signed its death warrant.

Somehow the note of certitude and the voice of authority are quite feeble when we speak about the character and the doom of sin; and a ministry of that sort will neither stir the souls of the saints to activity, nor grip the hearts of sinners with the conviction that leads to repentance. We are not lacking in eloquent preachers in many pulpits, nor artistic singers in the choirs, but the appeal of the soul-winner is lacking. We talk charmingly about goodness and sing seraphically about heaven, yet sinners are not repenting, and the lives of multitudes of the saints are of the "earth, earthy." There is more of beauty than virility in the modern pulpit. The preacher has become a man of affairs, a manipulator of interests, a puller of wires, an expert on organization, rather than a prophet of God. Under such conditions the church has become afraid of the world, and the world no longer fears the life or the rebuke of the church.

Repentance and conversion have become weak words in numerous theological vocabularies, and the result is that penitent sinners and rejoicing converts are strange sights

in most of the assemblies of the saints. We are sapiently told that the day of revivals is past, and that we must no longer expect the sorrow for sin or the glow of pardon that once marked the work of salvation. Those things, they tell us, belonged to crude, primitive emotional experiences, which our culture and scientific habits of thought have outgrown. We are informed that the church of the future will cease to think in the terms of the old evangelism, and will not have its times of travail for the souls of the lost. This is more than weakness. These things are tantamount to open and unashamed surrender.

Such was not the church of the New Testament; it is not the spirit which has marked the mighty periods of kingdom conquest. The great facts of our religion have not changed. God is "the same yesterday, today, and forever." Sin is just as hideous and ugly as in the days of old, and its wages are still the undying death. Human nature has not altered one essential characteristic, and the plan of salvation has not changed a single iota. Repentance and faith remain the only way into eternal life through Christ, and the new birth is just as necessary as when our Lord preached to Nicodemus in the shadows of that Judean night. The trouble is just as in the days of the weeping prophet: "My people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that hold no water" (Jer. 2: 13).

It is high time that we learn the futility of our human endeavor, the folly of fighting in our own strength, or in the armor of our own invention. We need the Spirit who came at Pentecost. We perish for the breath of God. Shall we not cry with Elisha, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?"?

There are many so-called Christian leaders, who hold lightly the essential truths of the New Testament. They speak weakly because they have ceased to believe mightily. "I believed, and therefore have I spoken," has been the experience of all forceful Christian leaders. Many preachers and churches no longer deem it necessary to have a Christ who could say: "Before Abraham was I am." Redemption with them is a washed-out word and has lost its coloring of blood. Sin is no longer exceeding sinful, nor do they exhort those seeking to escape its thraldom and guilt to cry mightily unto God.

A church that is not convicted in its inmost life of the basic truths of a mighty gospel, will degenerate into a sort of mild ecclesiasticism, which will concern itself mainly about organizations, formalities of ritual, and shallow social reformations. Our religion must either take its place with Buddhism, Confucianism, Islamism, and like faiths, as one of the attempts of man to work out his own moral destiny; or there must be a return to the unshaken certitude,—the militant, conquering faith which marked the first century, the period of the Reformation, and the early days of modern missionary endeavor.

The Holy Spirit is still in the world; the power which Jesus promised is yet within our reach, but we can attain it only by cleansing our lives, humbling our hearts and seeking God's face. This will call for prayer—real, intense, persistent, agonizing prayer.

God has never failed His people in any crisis. When all Christendom was groaning under the corruptions and tyrannies of Rome, He heard the cries of His people and raised up Wycliffe, Huss, Luther, and the other heroes of the Reformation. When the light was going out in America and England in the eighteenth century, He gave Ed-

wards to America, Whitefield and the Wesleys to England and the world.

In the period following the American Revolution, when the demoralization of eight years war, accompanied by the skepticism of France, the deism of England, and the illuminism of Germany, threatened the very life of religion, God heard the cries of His faithful, and answered with revival fires that changed the history of America and were felt around the world.

A few of His choicest saints met to pray, and He relighted the torch of foreign missions that had been only a smoking flax for centuries. This imperial, globe-girdling enterprise was born among the praying elect whose hearts bore a lost world to a throne of grace.

Our God has given us in hours of need such men as Knapp, Finney, Earle, Moody, Spurgeon, Chapman, Torrey and a host of others. Has His power departed with them? "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" Yes, the God of Whitefield, of Carey, of Judson, of Moffatt, and Livingstone? Was He mighty only while they lived? Has the God of Elijah abdicated, or forgotten His promises? Only by laying hold upon the power of the living God, as furnished in the dynamic of His ageless gospel, and the enduement of the Holy Spirit, can our victory be won.

The call of the hour is for men and women who are mighty in prayer, masters of supplication, specialists in the holy art of intercession. The God of Elijah was the answering God. Something happened when Elijah prayed that would not have happened if he had not prayed. There was no doubt about the reality of Jehovah in the mind of those who heard Elijah pray upon Carmel and saw the living fire fall from the arched heavens to blaze upon His altar.

If we shall pray! Listen to His Word: "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and heal their land" (2 Chron. 7: 14). This is a dateless promise; these are timeless words; they are for God's people of every land and for all time. If we will only pray, we need not fear the mightiest foes. Let God once breathe upon His people, let the fires of the Holy Spirit begin to burn, and the worldliness of our churches will vanish like chaff in a consuming fire.

One mighty, Holy Spirit-led revival will destroy more unbelief, will do more to silence the gibing, questioning, sneering brood of half-baked skeptics that have grown out of the attempt to destroy the supernatural, than all our books and arguments will do in a hundred years. Now I would not for one moment belittle the work of that faithful band of men and women who are facing the most relentless, unfair and insulting foe the cause of Christ has ever encountered. It is right that they should fight, and something is wrong with the man who tries to be neutral when eternal issues are at stake. But the fighters must also pray, and they fight best when they pray. When our sword is broken in our hand, when we are beaten to the dust, when the foe exultingly claims the field, we have only begun to fight. Our mightiest weapon is what old John Bunyan called "All-prayer," and we use it best when our faces are in the dust.

The Elijahs have gone home; the whirlwinds of God have swept them beyond our earthly ken; but their God still lives, and hears, and answers. Where, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?"

Chapter II

A MAN OF LIKE PASSIONS

THERE was a bit of sensation in the court of Ahab. It must have afforded quite a time of merriment for Queen Jezebel and her ladies in waiting. A strange looking man from the hills, wearing the rude dress of the wild tribes who lived in the hills east of the Jordan, had just stalked out with the mien of an avenging angel. No one knew him; he just walked in and delivered his message in one terse sentence. Listen to the roll of the thunder in it. "As Jehovah the God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be rain or dew these years, but according to my word." Some of them were amused, the haughty Jezebel sneered, the courtiers guffawed, but the weak Ahab shuddered. He had been brought up in Israel, and had heard that the word of men who worshiped Jehovah sometimes came true. But the man was seen no more, and under the spell of Jezebel and her gay throng, things went on in their wonted way.

However, in a little while, some one noticed that the grass and flowers had no dew, even in the early morning, and that all the clouds seemed to avoid the land of Israel; but of course that uncouth stranger had nothing to do with it, it was just an ordinary drought. Still the weeks grew into months. The crops were dying, the olive orchards were withering, and the leaves curled and fell from the vines in the vineyards. The grass was shriveled and dead. No dews freshened the dusty earth, while the burning sun seared and scorched the soil that the clouds and rain seemed to have forgotten. The months

became years, the whole land was a barren waste, and starving cattle wandered over the hillsides and huddled about the places where pools and springs once were.

The people were perplexed and troubled; more than that, they were poor, ragged and hungry. The sycophants of the court had bread, and the king had been able to keep a few horses, but that was all. Famine—gaunt, stark, gristly famine ranged through the land, while the suffering people wondered what had become of the mysterious stranger who had made that dire prediction.

Three and one-half years had passed—hard, bitter, hungry years, when one day the man whom God had hidden while kings hunted for his life, stood once more before the ruler of Israel. The astonished Ahab stammered out, "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" Like a bolt from the blue came the challenging answer, "I have not troubled Israel, but thou and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandment of Jehovah and thou has followed Baalim."

Then the strange prophet, speaking with the note of conscious authority, commanded the cringing monarch to call all Israel, together with the eight hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and Astarte, to meet on the summit of Mount Carmel. The terrified ruler obeyed and the assembly was called. What a crowd they were, as gaunt, tattered and hunger-bitten, they toiled along the dusty roads of Israel, all trudging toward Carmel!

The news of the return of the strange prophet had spread like wild-fire through the land, and the people were intensely interested. They were a weary, forlorn, half-starved, discouraged, human crowd, looking with anxious eyes for anything that might promise bread. They had been thinking during those lonely, awful days,—think-

ing in the slow, hard, irregular way in which a crowd thinks, and they were ready to listen.

One can imagine the breathless excitement when Elijah, the man of mystery, came forward and flung that daring challenge into the teeth of the eight hundred and fifty robed flamen of idolatry. Hear him! "Can your god hear? Does he answer? Does anything happen when you pray to Baal, that would not happen if you did not pray? I am willing to put my God to the test before this multitude. Will you meet the test?" One can fancy how each word struck like a missile and burned like a red hot coal. Of course they accepted, they must, or leave the field in ignominious defeat.

The altars were built, and all day long the robed and mitered devotees of those hideous Phœnician deities prayed. As the hours wore on they became desperate, leaped upon their altars like madmen, and gashed their bodies until their blood stained the altar and mingled with the gore of the sacrifice. At last the day passed, and ashamed, exhausted and sullen, they ceased to cry.

At the hour of the evening sacrifice Elijah came forward, his coarse coat of camel's hair so unique in contrast with the gorgeous robes of his foes. With dignified simplicity he repaired the desecrated altar of Jehovah and prepared his sacrifice. There was something poetically fitting in the fact that the place of answer was a restored altar, which the parasites of Jezebel had doubtless pulled down.

One can only faintly picture the hushed and rapt attention of that motley, haggard, tristful throng as they listened to Elijah's prayer. There were no pompous phrases, no frenzied appeals; just a simple plea for the vindication of Jehovah, for His approval upon His lone

prophet, and the turning back of the hearts of Israel. A very simple, grandly simple, prayer it was; but the fire fell from the bended heavens, and sacrifice and altar melted in the consuming flame before the eyes of the awed and staring multitude. The climax came when from the lips of the people, prone upon the earth, arose the cry: "Jehovah, he is God." Elijah had won, Jehovah was vindicated, and the forces of heathendom were crushed.

But Elijah had not finished his praying. Rain must come to refresh the barren and wasted land. Alone upon the mountain, his face bowed between his knees, he prayed; and when a cloud like a man's hand arose from the sea, he came down warning Ahab to hasten his return to the palace lest the rain stop him.

The scene closed with the exulting prophet racing before the royal chariot through the driving storm to the gates of Jezreel. The crowd that had thronged the mountain plodded homeward, through the first rain for more than three years, and pondered the power and faithfulness of Jehovah.

The story of Elijah's praying has been the subject of much wonder and speculation; various legends have grown about him and his life work, some of which would make him more than human.

It will do us good to study this shaggy son of the hills who held the reins of the storms, and wore the keys of the clouds at his girdle. Who is he? Was he favored of Jehovah with privileges and powers above those granted to other men? It would be easy to think so, and explain him in that way. We read however in James: "Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it rained not upon the earth by the space of three years and six

months, and he prayed again and the heaven gave rain and the earth brought forth her fruit" (James 5: 17, 18). Here we are plainly told that he was a man under the same burden of human weakness that each of us bears; therefore we know that his mighty attainments are not beyond the grasp of other men. "A man subject to like passions"! A frail, tempted man, with the keys of the rain in his trembling hands! How did he get it? "He prayed earnestly." We may well ponder what there was about his praying to bring such results; for to know the secret of such achievements is wondrously worth while.

We can get a glimpse into the heart of Elijah if we look at him at the right time. And there is no time when a man will so fully open every secret of his soul, as the hour when he feels that all his plans have gone awry, and the castles of life's dearest dreams lie in fragments in the dust.

Let us look at Elijah down at Horeb, after he had fled from the scene of action, praying to die. When God said to him, "What doest thou here, Elijah?" the question was not answered; yet we get a look into the storm-tossed soul of the prophet, and can read his inner life as an open book. Hear his words: "I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life to take it away" (1 Kings 19: 10).

Elijah loved Jehovah supremely, and the manner in which He was being forsaken by Israel, stirred his soul to the depths. Jehovah was being dishonored in the land, the love and worship due Him was being given to Baal; the altars dedicated to Him had been torn down, and the

hateful, lecherous worship of a heathen land set up in their place. Elijah had looked on as they hunted to death the prophets of Jehovah, and now his was the only voice lifted for the God of his fathers. The ancient covenant was broken, and the name of Jehovah was a by-word in the land where David had reigned and Solomon had builded.

Elijah had watched all this from his home in the hills of Gilead, until his whole nature was aflame with an indignant, holy revolt. He had pondered the situation until he saw the utter futility of any human aid, and turning to the last resort of great souls, he began to pray. He had read in the law where God had said by the mouth of Moses: "Take heed to yourselves that your hearts be not deceived, and ye turn aside and serve other gods and worship them; and the Lord's wrath be kindled against you, and he shut up the heaven that there be no rain" (Deut. 11: 16, 17). Elijah looked out over a land where God and His covenant were being forgotten, a land that was sinking into a cesspool of vice and corruption, and he began to pray. The condition was desperate, and as he thought of all the issues involved, he said in his heart, "It were better that the nation should be poor, ragged and hungry, than that they should forget God." He looked over the smiling land, with its comfortable homes, its purple vineyards, its fields of amber grain, with the dark foliage of the olives dotting it here and there, and cried, "O God, take all this away that they may remember thee." We are told that he prayed earnestly, and the intensity is only understood when we know what he asked God to do. Elijah loved his country too well to rejoice in its material prosperity while the land lay in sin. He was willing to see all its temporal glory swept

away, if only the altars of Jehovah might once more have their worshipers, and the hills of Ephraim be vocal with His praise. We do not know how long he prayed; but it would seem that the intensity of his desire grew until all the glory of Israel, all of her wealth and prosperity, all of his own possession, his very life itself, were put upon the altar for Jehovah.

Every prophet of the true God who had dared raise his voice had died to appease the blood lust of Jezebel. It was Jehovah or Baal, and Elijah cast his all on the side of Jehovah. Then came the call to deliver God's message in the very stronghold of the foe. If Elijah was going all the way, he must beard the wild beast in its lair. Elijah was ready to die that day when he hurled that thunderbolt of a message into the teeth of Ahab and Jezebel. He had counted the cost and was willing to pay the price, if only the name of Jehovah be exalted, and Israel redeemed.

Here was a man praying, and all that he had, all that he was, were back of that prayer. He was asking nothing for himself. Elijah simply did not count, it was for the glory of Jehovah, and the salvation of Israel. He was all for God, there was no compromise in his convictions of duty. Elijah could not look upon sin like that without a declaration of war. To see that degrading idolatry, to behold the bleeding bodies of Jehovah's prophets, brought his sword leaping from its scabbard. Obadiah might fear Jehovah and live in the palace with Ahab and Jezebel. Elijah could just as easily have bowed at the beastly altars of Baal. He loved the name and teachings of Jehovah with the white heat of a flaming passion, and he hated with equal fervor that which befouled the holy objects of his love. James says that "he prayed earnestly." Such a man could pray in no other way. His

prayers looked the conditions squarely in the face. He knew that no easy-going exhortations would sweep that abominable idolatry from the land. Compromise was unthinkable. The enemy was too defiant, too sensual, too vile and devilish for that. The danger was impending, and it was deadly, dire, damning danger. The land was rotting, licentiousness in its foulest forms was being deified, and Israel was being steadily polluted. No pliant, half-hearted, tolerant soul could be Jehovah's champion at such an hour. Besides all this, Elijah was a man of mighty passions, and his whole being was enlisted upon the side of God and righteousness. A holy fire glowed like a furnace in his soul. Men of the Elijah type have been the great reformers of history. Times come when it is necessary to fight destructive evils to a finish, when it is imperative to wage a truceless war. At such hours there is too much at stake, and the foe is too strong and vile for any but the sternest measures. It was in such a day, that Elijah lived, wrought, and prayed.

The fact is, that sin, actual, undiluted sin, never yields; it is relentless and cruel as the grave; and when it becomes dominant in a land, incarnated as it were in persons of authority, it surrenders only when compelled to do so. History has known sin in no more degrading and brutalizing form than the unspeakable immoralities associated with the odious idolatry against which Elijah fought. Not only was the worship of Jehovah being neglected, the moral fiber of the nation was rotting. The whole movement had its personification in Jezebel, the shrewd, relentless wife of Ahab, steeped from childhood in the profligacy of that foul Eastern idolatry. When hours like these arise in the history of God's work, then comes an Elijah.

No quiet, placid spirit could have led the Protestant Reformation; it demanded a man with the rugged strength and dauntless spirit of Luther. The stormy days of Scotland needed the iron courage of John Knox. The corruptions of Florence and Italy called for the fiery courage and martyr soul of Savonarola.

When a soul like that of Elijah was stirred to its depths, it was like the boiling lava from a heaving volcano. He threw every power of his impetuous nature into the conflict. He saw in the worship of Jehovah the full mission of Israel for the world, and his whole being was absorbed in maintaining its form and spirit. He also saw with crystal clearness that the thing which was eating like a deadly ulcer at the vitals of the nation, meant utter ruin, physical, national, moral ruin; so for God and his people he threw himself into the breach.

Imagine, if possible, the praying of such a man! Think of him alone in some mountain gorge, all these things smoldering in his soul, flinging himself and his cause upon the promise of Jehovah. If you can picture this, you will learn something of what is meant by the saying, "He prayed earnestly." For Elijah to be in earnest meant more than it meant for ordinary souls. He hurled all that he had into that yawning chasm, hurled it in with both hands, and then leaped in himself. Nothing counted except the blotting out of this foul thing that cursed his people and dishonored the name of his God. It was to such a man that God gave the guidance of the chariots of the storm for three and a half years. Yes, gave them to a man,—a man, weak, frail, tempted, "a man of like passions"—just a trembling, mortal man. But this man was mastered by a holy, consuming passion which blazed in his soul by day and by night. It was Elijah against Jeze-

bel. Jezebel for Baal and all that his worship meant; Elijah for Jehovah and His law. To all finite vision, the odds were mightily against Elijah. With Jezebel and Ahab were the armies of Israel, while Elijah seemingly stood alone. But they forgot, as the forces of evil have always forgotten, that the God of Elijah was the answering God, and that something happens when His children cry unto Him. The powers of sin have never understood, and cannot understand God's dealings with His people. When they see them cast down, when they hear them pray and see no answer, they are ready to cry, "Where is their God?" They do not know that although He waits long ofttimes, waits while His people put their faces in the dust and pray with an earnestness that fairly consumes them, waits till they draw the sword and throw away the scabbard in grim battle to the death with hosts of night, that in the end He always answers.

It was so in this struggle. It was a finish fight; either Elijah or Baal must go. If Baal won, Elijah did not care to live. That Baal might go, he was willing to die. Do you think God would fail a man like that? Then you do not know Elijah's God. No man who honored God in such an hour, who stood single-handed for Him against such odds, would be allowed to stand alone. God would have sustained him if it had called for every angel of the heavenly legions all panoplied for war.

"What do you want, Elijah?"

"I want to see Israel brought back to Jehovah, and His name again honored in the land. I want to see the abominable things of Baal cast out."

"Do you want nothing for yourself?"

"Nothing, just give me what I ask and I am willing to die."

"How much do you believe in me?"

"I believe in Thee enough to challenge all these false prophets to a test; I am willing to put my God against everything. Baal is nothing, Jehovah is everything, and I want my people to know it; they have been deceived; therefore I have flung down the gauntlet, relying upon Thee." That was the spirit of Elijah. He wanted nothing but victory for his God, and he knew what victory meant.

Think of the colossal faith, that after years of waiting, hurled such a defiance in the face of his contemptuous foes. Possibly no man in history had more fully forsaken all for God. He was homeless and penniless, wearing only his rude mantle of camel's hair, until the time that God robed him in immortal glory. He lived and wrought, inspired by the radiant vision that gleamed in his soul. Hear him pray! God would be untrue to everything that He ever did or ever said, if He should forget a man like that.

It was singularly appropriate that God should take Elijah home in a way different from other men. He had forsaken all for Jehovah. There is no record that he had any ties of home and kindred. He was an outcast for God upon earth, and when the end came, death, which he had dared, fled away, and the old hero went to his reward without passing through the gloomy gates.

But we must not think of such praying as an easy thing. It was not easy for Elijah, and it will not be easy for us. It does not mean that we will have to live lonely and homeless as he lived, but it does mean that God and His cause must be first, that in all our planning and thinking self shall pass out of sight, and the glory of the Lord be our all in all.

Yes, a man of "like passions," an imperfect man, who had to battle all his life long with the weaknesses of the flesh; one who became so discouraged that he ran away and wanted to die, yet commanded the goings of the clouds, and called the fires from the heavenly altars by the might of his compelling faith.

Chapter III

THE MAN WHO WRESTLED WITH GOD

WHEN we first meet him, Jacob is a very sorry candidate for saintship. There was little to admire in his character. He was a crooked, scheming, cheating brother, and a deceitful son. Worst of all he was proud of the things for which he should have been ashamed, and felt himself much superior to the gullible and easily cheated Esau.

About the only commendable traits which appeared in early life were his patience and his sense of values. This was just where Esau was lacking. Unlike Jacob, he saw no worth in anything which he could not enjoy in the here and now. He had none of the stuff that learns to labor and to wait. Esau lived to the flesh, and was of "the earth, earthy." The things which he could see and handle were all that appealed to him. Birthrights and promises were vague, and belonged to the distant future, and for that reason could be sold cheaply. One pot of red pottage smoking on the table meant more to him than all the spiritual blessings God had promised to their family.

Jacob could see great things from afar, and work and plan through weary years until they became his. The early methods used by Jacob are such as no one who fears God can approve. He started poorly and traveled very slowly along the highway of holiness, yet he could appreciate spiritual values, and while he walked haltingly, he also walked long and far. In the beginning, he is the supplanter; and we see him shrewdly watching poor gluttonous Esau swear away his birthright, while watch-

ing with avid lips and eager appetite the steaming dish that Jacob had placed before him. Jacob realized to the full what was going on, but Esau did not. The fact that Esau did not, and could not appreciate the value of the birthright was one reason why God had to take Jacob, trickster though he was. Jacob joined with his unscrupulous mother to defraud Esau out of the blessing by fooling poor blind Isaac, and all through the transaction there was a sort of pride in his superior cunning, and a feeling of pity and contempt for Esau, who was so short-sighted, and so easily fooled.

The flight to Haran from the wrath of the hasty, hot-blooded brother is a familiar story. Rebekah thought Esau would soon forget and Jacob could come home, but neither of them saw the long intervening years.

On that journey God began to deal with Jacob, and in that wonderful vision during the lonely night in the fields, the man took the first steps of his long and varied religious experiences. Lying there upon the bare earth, his head pillowed upon a stone, he had his first real concept of holy things. The vision, the voice, and the vow of Bethel make one of the high spots in this remarkable life. Here was his first glimpse of the greatness and glory of his father's God. It was during that fateful night that he heard for the first time the voice which had guided Abraham on his lonely pilgrimage, and assured his father Isaac of Jehovah's abiding blessing. The vows which he made the next morning were his heart's first response to the call of God. Jacob went on to Haran, but he never entirely forgot Bethel, though the vision faded and the vows were not fully kept. Without the memory of Bethel, Jacob would never have had the courage for Jabbok.

Were the record complete, the story would be too long to tell how the splendor became dim, and the experience of that night lost its power in the life of the man.

More than twenty years passed—busy, crowded, scheming years, before God seemed to pay any attention to the fact that Jacob had forgotten. These years had not been all bad with him, no man ever entirely gets away from his life's Bethel. No doubt there were nights in the fields with the herds, when Jacob saw again that burnished ladder, watched once more those heavenly messengers, and thrilled at the sound of that searching voice. But not many men grow godly while they are getting rich, and there was little spiritual development in contracting those polygamous marriages and making money by trading with Laban.

When he set out on his return to Canaan, Jacob was well pleased. He had out-traded his father-in-law, he had a fine family of growing children, and he was rich. The man who went over Jordan with nothing but the staff in his hand, had now become two bands, and he felt that his good right arm and his keen brain had gotten it all. And yet, it was a poor backslider who was on his way back to Canaan. God was wanting a man back in Canaan, one who would be His man, and while Jacob was not all bad, he looked like a very sorry successor to Abraham, the friend of God.

The real crisis came like lightning from a clear sky. When God comes into the life of a backslider, he usually comes when least expected. Jacob was a backslider and he was not sorry; rather he was proud of the things for which he should have been ashamed. He was going along contented and at ease when the news came of Esau and

his four hundred clansmen. Jacob was rudely awakened to his great peril, and found himself in unusual straits. Always in the past, his keen brain and ready cunning had been sufficient to his needs, but now they failed him. Jacob needed God, but God was hidden and silent. Jacob prayed, and then turned back to his old scheming. He wanted to feel that he had helped solve his problems, so he tried again to play upon the weakness of Esau by artfully arranging his gifts and sending them on before. It is possible that there was something of the spirit of restitution in the unusual presents, and that Jacob wanted to feel that in some measure he was atoning for his treacherous fraud. Things were not yet right with God, and Jacob knew it. God was working with Jacob. Every step of the way from Haran, God had been leading him toward Jabbok. Surely the soul of Jacob must have been stirred by memories at this time—memories of home, memories of his ugly sins, memories of that night when the open heavens flamed above his stony pillow, memories of those long wayward years. We could wish that we might know more about the stormy struggle of this epochal night that transformed his life. We know that he had set his heart upon the help of God, but found that before he could get that help there was an old account to be settled, and that God was ready for settlement, and he was not. No man ever had more to do in so short time than Jacob had this crucial night. Jacob was desperate, he was defenseless before Esau, and when he tried to fall back upon God, God was hidden and silent. It is evident to those who know something of how God deals with men, that the soul of Jacob was searched to the depths that night. Jacob was afraid—all his wealth was about to be swept away, his family and his

very life in danger. He had come to the place where he could not go alone, he must have the help of God; but things must be made right with God before that aid could come. All his scheming, all his dishonesty, all his broken vows filed in silent reproach before his terror-stricken, remorseful soul. Jacob was made to see how little help there was in the things in which he had trusted, and was brought face to face with the insufficiency of Jacob the supplanter.

Many theories have been advanced as to what really took place that night. Was that which Jacob encountered a genuine, bodily form, or do the words only describe an intense spiritual struggle? Possibly both ideas are correct. But this we know, the experience was one of stern reality to Jacob. God was there, and Jacob was there. Jacob wanted to win the favor of God and remain the same old Jacob. God could not let Jacob enter Canaan and inherit the promises in that way; he must receive all as the gift of God's grace, and not as the conquest of his own hand. God was not going to do a half-way work with Jacob. All his sin must be cast out, all his pride must be humbled, all his trust in his own resourceful shrewdness must be forsaken. God needed a man to stand in the line of Abraham and hand down his messages of revelation, and He was making that man out of Jacob. The poor backslider must see his sin, and he must deal with that sin in the light of God's presence.

Jacob wanted the covenant blessings, he wanted the inheritance promised his fathers. In the past he had tried to win them by deceit and guile; now all that must be thrown aside and he must seek the things of God in God's way. He must learn that no man can prevail with God in his own strength, least of all by his sin.

Strong men have a mighty capacity for suffering, and Jacob was no exception. The bigger the man, usually, the more ugly his sin, and the more bitter and lasting his Jabbok experience. Can we not imagine Jacob sitting there upon a stone, his face bowed in his hands, and his heart filled with bitterness and terror as he remembered Esau and thought of his impending ruin? May we not hear him crying, "O God, deliver me"; and the voice of God in his soul answering, "What about the fraud practiced upon Esau? How can I trust you, the man who broke the vows made at Bethel?"

May we not hear Jacob saying, "I have made restitution, I have divided with Esau." But there was more for Jacob to do, and the voice of God answers: "What about your crooked ways, are you ready to forsake them, to renounce your pride in your native shrewdness, quit depending on your arts of guile and deception, and rely wholly upon me?" We might hear Jacob groan and sigh in the darkness,—Jacob the guilty, conscious-stricken one, —afraid of Esau and more afraid of God, but unwilling to surrender his way. God was not against Jacob, but for him, yet He could do nothing for Jacob until he surrendered everything. God cannot forgive and use the guilty supplanter. It must be a new man who goes from that place with the favor of God.

Jacob did not win that night because of any lofty spiritual attainments, for he was only a poor backslider; nor was it because of his skill in the art of supplication. He had not prayed much those twenty years. Jacob won because he became so anxious to have the help of God, that he was willing to surrender his whole manner of life and be God's man. Jacob knew that he must make things right, that he must be what he had never been. The

trouble was that Jacob did not want to do what he saw God wanted done.

It was not easy to make restitution to Esaū. Jacob had made sport of his simple-minded brother, had been proud of his greater skill in driving bargains, had congratulated himself on his superior financial ability. But now he must give up all this and turn away from it as something unworthy, and utterly contemptible. This was the bitterest part of the cup which he drank. He had to renounce his chief native attainment, surrender the things in which he had exulted; and no more nauseous draught could have been pressed to the lips of a man like Jacob. All his shrewdness and knavish trickery were useless now. He was alone in the dark with God, yet it was not dark enough to keep Jacob from seeing some things more clearly than he had ever seen them before. It is possible that Jacob forgot all about the darkness, so possessed was he with the presence of God, and with such awful vividness did his sin stand out. How he pleaded, confessed, argued, promised, and still God did not answer. Jacob must come all the way, his sin must be torn out by the roots and thrown away.

No one knows, but it is hardly probable that Jacob meant to stay all night in that stressful struggle. But the issue once joined must be settled, and God was even more intent upon that settlement than Jacob. Jacob had set his heart upon help from Jehovah, but Jehovah would not help until Jacob surrendered, and Jacob did not want to surrender. In fact it was the last thing that he wanted to do. He wanted deliverance, but he also wanted to be the same old Jacob, priding himself in his ability to meet emergencies in his own strength. He did not want to live a simple life of faith, he wanted to live as he had been living, and to

be able to say, "I did it." Jacob had a pretty clear idea of what God wanted, but the quiet man was also an iron-willed man. He had always won out, and he hoped that in some way he might get by without paying the full price. He was greatly troubled, terribly afraid, but not willing to surrender. Jacob prayed, and prayed again and again, but the darkness mocked him. God would have all of His man.

Here is the picture of a strong man, a proud man, who had always won his way by his keen brain and tireless toil, trying to win the favor of God in the same way. History has known few men so tenacious as this Jacob, who spent all night at hand grips with God. The struggle was long and bitter; no wonder the Bible calls it a wrestle. Jacob was wrestling to keep his old life, his pride, his self-reliance, his cherished sin. He did not want to let God have His way, yet he wanted His favor more than he had ever wanted anything in the world. Jacob was wrestling to win God's help and keep his self life. God was wrestling to win Jacob and free him from his sinful self. Jacob did not yield until his divine antagonist lamed him in his body, and showed him that He could strip him of his strength in a moment. At last Jacob was conquered, and in the act of surrender won the desire of his heart. The heavenly adversary disabled him with a touch, and in that weakening made him strong in a greater and more lasting strength. God made him to limp that he might be able to walk with Him along the King's highway of holiness. All that Jacob now wanted was the blessing of Jehovah. He was willing to be His man and let Him have His way, if He would only bless him. I think he had almost forgotten about Esau. All that counted was God's blessing. He could

not and would not go on without the favor of Jehovah. He came to the place where he wanted God for His own sake. His heart and his flesh cried out for God, for the living God. He was crippled. All his proud self-confidence was gone. He was humbled into the very dust, but he held on: "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." It was the favor of God and not deliverance from danger about which he was thinking.

God had won, and Jacob had won. Jacob had won by repentance and surrender. God had won by humbling the man to the place where He could bless him and use him. God had His man and the man had a new name. Jacob was never again the old Jacob. No man is ever the same who comes face to face with God and wins by being conquered.

All that Jacob yielded was that which belonged to the old Jacob—the cheating, defrauding, confident, self-reliant Jacob. He gave up his pride, his self-conceit, his trust in his worldly wisdom. All that he kept was his longing for the favor and help of Jehovah. God saw the change and called him by a new name. He was no more the supplanter. Esau never again had need to fear his stealthy cunning. Never again did Jacob try to win his way by his wily brain and guileful fraud. From this time, he was more concerned about the will of Jehovah than about birthrights and paternal blessings. He was now Israel, a prince of God, a God-conquered man, who had at the same time prevailed with God. There is no further record of crookedness upon the part of Jacob after that night which he spent face to face with God.

What a night! What a wrestle! God was not wrestling against Jacob, but for him; not to crush him, but to bless him. He was wrestling against the old Jacob—the greedy,

covetous Jacob, the Jacob who thought that he could win the covenant blessing by guile and fraud, the Jacob who trusted in his masterful mind, his good right arm, and his unbending will. Jacob was struggling to bring God to bless him and remain the same old Jacob. In the deepest and truest sense, his real antagonist was his own evil self, and in surrendering himself, he prevailed with God. It was a God-mastered, and a self-mastered man who came limping into camp next morning. He was God-conquered because he was self-conquered, and self had been put under foot by being overcome of God. He was a man who had cast away everything in which he had trusted the evening before; a man with the marks of conflict upon his body, yet with the peace and power of God flooding his soul. There was not the least fear of Esau. All had been made right with God and he was dwelling under the shadow of His wings. He met Esau in the light of that new experience, and all was well. The supplanter was gone. God's prince had come.

In this story we have the picture of the man who had neglected God and duty, and suddenly came face to face with a great emergency where he needed more than human help. If Jacob had been living all the while in the spirit of the vision and the vows of Bethel, there would not have been that long and strenuous wrestling. When one of God's children lives as Jacob had been living, they will find a Jabbok of self-surrender and restitution before God will hear. Jacob came halting from Peniel, stripped of all the things that had been his pride, but panoplied in the power that comes when men yield their all to God.

Chapter IV

HOLDING GOD'S HANDS

ISRAEL had sinned. The golden calf had usurped the place of the God of Sinai. The wrath of Jehovah was aflame against the heinous transgression. Only a few days before they had stood with awe and trembling in the presence of the flame-wrapped mountain and listened with silent dread to the mysterious voice that trumpeted forth the fiats of the Eternal. They had vowed in deep solemnity to be faithful to that holy covenant, and Moses had gone alone with Jehovah to receive the stony tablets upon which His finger had traced the ten immortal words.

The people were too weak for the forty days of waiting and the concept of an unseen, eternal Jehovah was too much for them. So they went to Aaron and clamored for a god whom they could see and touch. Aaron weakly yielded and made the golden calf. Israel had turned back to the beastly idolatry of Egypt.

Moses was rudely awakened from his exalted experience, and commanded to go down to his people, because they had corrupted themselves and turned aside to other gods. Moses rallied his powers and his soul leaped to plead for Israel in earnest, vehement, passionate intercession. And right here we find one of the most remarkable sentences ever spoken by the Almighty to one of His creatures: "Let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation" (Exod. 32: 10).

This is a staggering word to fall from the lips of Omnipotence. Jehovah is asking permission, not from an

archangel armored in might, not from some principality of the heavenly heights, but from a lone man upon his face in the dust. Let us walk softly here and think this over carefully. God is speaking to a man: "Let me alone —that my wrath—that I may." God asking permission of a man, a man heartbroken, crushed over the awful thing that had happened!

Get the scene: the Eternal a suppliant before a creature of yesterday, the All-powerful asking permission of a child of clay, the weakest restraining the mightiest, the finite enthralling the Infinite, a man prone upon his face in an agony of supplication, holding the arms of Omnipotence.

Jehovah cries: "Let me alone, that I may—." What is the man doing? He is praying, praying in a perfect passion of self-abandonment, not for himself, but for his people. Let us hush our very hearts and listen to that prayer of the long ago. "Lord, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people, which thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? Wherefore should the Egyptians speak, and say, For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent thee of this evil against thy people" (Exod. 32: 11, 12). Hear him again: "Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold; yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin —; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written" (Exod. 32:31,32).

If we will notice these prayers carefully we will find some things standing out as essential.

I. There is an utter lack of any selfish element. Moses asks nothing for himself, his own interests have

no place in this high hour. The fact that God would make of him a great nation does not affect him in the least. He has forgotten himself in a great enterprise for God and Israel. He will not for one moment allow himself to consider taking the place of Abraham as the father of a new nation, and having his name go down the centuries as the man with whom God made an everlasting covenant. The honor of Jehovah and the welfare of Israel fill his heart to the exclusion of all else. Jehovah had made Himself the champion and defender of Israel before the world. If Israel should perish, the reproach would fall upon Him. Jehovah would be dishonored among the nations, and the Egyptians would say that He was just like other gods,—either too weak to finish what He had begun, or a cruel tyrant unable to restrain His passionate wrath. Moses had put himself in line with the age-long plans of God, and would not accept aggrandizement at the cost of the honor of Jehovah or the ruin of Israel.

II. There also runs through his praying a deep and unselfish love for Israel. Moses does not belittle their sin. His soul is aghast at the perfidy of their covenant-breaking. To Moses that golden calf stood with all four of its feet upon the broken and dishonored law of Jehovah. They have indeed "sinned a great sin." Listen again to his supplication: "Yet, if thou wilt forgive their sin—; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written." Moses did not want to live if Jehovah was discredited or Israel destroyed. They were known as the chosen people of his God. For them to perish would write failure over against the name of Jehovah, and that was more than Moses could endure. Then they were his people. It was faith in their destiny that

led him to turn his back upon all that men call worthwhile. His life was bound up with the lot of Israel. He could not and would not give them up. It was Jehovah first, Israel second, and Moses forgotten. When a man prays who is willing to put God first in everything, and is willing to be blotted out rather than that His cause should suffer loss, and can be moved by no motives of self-interest, then by all the laws of His holy compassionate nature, God must listen to that man. He has put himself in line with eternal holiness, he has become a link in the chain of God's everlasting purposes, he has made himself a factor among the forces for the "kingdom of God and his righteousness." God will, yea, God must, listen.

III. These prayers also glow and burn with an abiding and consuming earnestness. The earnestness alone would have made them great. Moses put his career, his life, his very all into the breach. He picked up all his present, all his future, with his two hands and flung it in one bundle at the feet of God. "Take it all," he cried, "but hear me." What a passionate love for Israel throbbed in this prayer! To be mighty in prayer is to be great in love. To be omnipotent in the realm of the heart is to heave with unspeakable emotions.

Many of us think of Moses as a man who was of meek and quiet spirit. He has been pictured as one who was never swept by mighty passions that scorch and sear like the sirocco of the desert. But the concept is wrong! Because he was impatient of speech only once during that strenuous, taxing forty years, does not indicate that he was naturally of gentle and placid spirit. His meekness was that of a God-taught self-control. That man was a volcano inside, a volcano bigger than Etna or Vesuvius, a great flaming furnace of a man, the tides of whose nature

ran strong and deep. In these prayers we see love in its deepest intensity, and loyalty in its fullest measure. It was in the fervent heat of such a soul aflame with sacrifice and self-denying love that such praying was born. Supplications like these are not possible to little souls; they have no room for such thoughts and such emotions. Only the princes of prayer, the royal priesthood of intercession, enter into this holy heritage.

God is forced by the laws under which He deals with His creatures to give heed to prayers like these. Here was a man in fellowship with God, honoring His name, loving with a full heart the same things which God loved,—a man who was putting his all into the things for which he prayed, willing to be lost sight of that the kingdom might come. By every law of His being, by His mercy, by every word which He has spoken unto men, God will hear, aye, must hear that man. God has put all the resources of infinity, yea more, His very being, at the command of such praying.

The most wonderful thing about it is, that Moses had not the slightest thought of the greatness of the thing that he was doing. Great prayers are never self-conscious. That person prays most effectively, who forgets himself, forgets the onlookers, forgets to think about the manner in which he is praying and pours out his heart before God with the simplicity of a little child. People like Moses are willing to be called fanatics, they have no time to worry about what men think of them. They will risk all their future, all their life prospects, for God and His cause. Listen to Moses: "Blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written. What does it matter about me? Let the work of Jehovah prosper; let Israel fulfill her destiny." God cries, "Let me alone." But Moses does

not let God alone. If he had been the man who would let God alone, these momentous words would never have been spoken. A man with such a burden upon his heart, with a fire like that in his soul, could not let God alone. And because he could not, and would not, he won the victory.

It was such deeds that made Moses one of the mile posts of the centuries, one of the granite crags of history from which men count backward and forward. The man was great in many ways. As a leader he stands pre-eminent; as a writer, a criterion for all time; as a legislator, he made laws for the ages. There is no field in which he wrought that he does not loom large on the horizon of the world's achievement. Men pore over his writings, wonder at the simple grandeur of his unique story of creation, and his universal conceptions of justice and righteousness. Thinkers of all lands and all time have stood silent before the moral dignity of the Ten Words which he gave them from the eternal Jehovah.

But lofty as Moses was in all these realms, he was greater still as an intercessor before Jehovah. It was as a man of prayer that he was greatest of all, and in that field he wrought his greatest achievements. Moses was God's man in an enterprise fraught with measureless meaning to the entire race. He was the leader of the chosen people, through whom God saw fit to reveal Himself, and of whom the Redeemer should come. All that this people meant to the future, all their trials and burdens, he bore continually in his great soul. Moses needed to pray; he was compelled to keep where he could pray. He did not, like Jacob, have to fight a battle with himself before he could pray. He was God's man; he could pray anywhere. It was as natural for him to break into prayer,

when he found himself in need of God's help, as it was to breathe. God and Moses were working at the same things; he did not have to line up; he was already yoked to the chariot of God's great plans. There was perfect understanding between them, and Moses could "make haste" at any time into the presence of Jehovah. Such relation is necessary for that sort of praying. One must be a trained spiritual athlete, disciplined, ready at all times to throw every power of mind and heart into the arena of prayer.

Yes, Moses was ready to pray, but he did not get ready for such praying in a day. It takes time for a man to learn to pray like that. Long before this, amid the splendors of the Egyptian court, he had made his choice, and turned from the dazzling honors of the double crown to suffer and toil for God's enslaved people. He had renounced all that could be offered by a kingdom that left in its ashes the halls of Karnak, the wondrous pyramids, and the puzzling sphinx, to suffer reproach with the nation of God's own choice.

We must always remember that such attainments are not cheaply gained! We must learn to think about the cost, the cost in self-denial, the cost of the break with the world, the price in discipline, of walking in the dark by faith. Moses had paid the full toll. He had burned every bridge, forsaken all that men value and seek, and was attempting the seemingly impossible with God. All his capital, physical, mental, moral, was invested with Jehovah. They were partners in mighty tasks, in more than Herculean labors. It was because of these things, that the man was strong in a power to which his foes were strangers. He was allied to invincible might.

The keys to the treasure house of God's favor are not lightly given. The privilege of coming under all condi-

tions into the inner court is a costly one, and the price is paid in many ways. These favors belong to those who have conquered every low and base motive and have cast their human all into the plans of God.

"Let me alone, Moses."

"Blot me, I pray thee, out of Thy book! If my God fails and Israel is destroyed, let me perish. My life is empty, if they fail. Let me die."

But the man who prayed like that could not die. In that cry is the very essence of all that makes for life eternal. The man who could so lose his life found it more abundantly, and belongs to the ages.

Chapter V

THE MAN WHO PRAYED ON

SAMUEL came of praying stock. Some people will tell you there is nothing in heredity, but history will not agree with them. There is somehow a heredity of divine favor, else how could God say: "Visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments" (Exod. 20:5,6)? He does not mean that godliness and divine favor are an inheritance after the flesh, but that the lives and influence of those who love Him and keep His words shall bless their offspring for thousands of generations.

Samuel came into the world in answer to prayer, and was given to God before his birth. His infancy was spent in a prayer atmosphere, for the mother who prayed for her babe, and vowed him to Jehovah, prayed all the more when he came into her arms. Doubtless his earliest memories were of the prayers of Hannah, one of the great mothers of all time. When he went to live in the tabernacle at Shiloh, there was prayer as a matter of course. The worship had sadly degenerated, but old Eli no doubt prayed many times in the hearing of the impressionable boy. One cannot overestimate what these things meant to the tender child whose unfolding life was moulded in an environment of prayer and devotion.

Samuel reached manhood in one of the low hours of the long and checkered history of Israel. The nation had sinned and had not ceased. Idolatry had poisoned the land, and the fires of religion and patriotism had about

gone out. Here and there among the people was a flicker of the worship of Jehovah, and at Shiloh the forms of religion were kept up, but all the national faith had become formal and dead. The whole nation was down in the slime and filth of a long period of backsliding, when Samuel came upon the scene. Their hereditary enemies, the Philistines, had beaten them in battle; Hophni and Phineas, the evil offspring of a great line, had perished in the struggle; and the ark, the sacred symbol of Jehovah's presence, had been captured by their hated foes. The whole land lay under the yoke. National glory was gone, pride of race was crushed, and religion was dying. It was in this dull, drear, leaden hour that Samuel came into leadership.

We find him coming into his own at a great national prayer meeting. Now a man does not become the praying leader of a people in a day. Such things just do not happen. There had been many anxious hours before God on the part of Samuel before the spirit of repentance was manifest in the heart of Israel. It is not easy to pray a whole people back to God. It is not easy to pray onesself close to God in a time of universal religious lethargy. Only God knew the lonely hours during which Samuel had pleaded the cause of the degenerate nation.

All great revivals have been born in some secret place of prayer. People who are strangers to the workings of the Holy Spirit prate about favorable conditions for revivals. The most favorable time the world has ever known for the kindling of revival fires, is when a company of God's children are upon their faces, confessing their sins and imploring His mercy.

Samuel was a real leader. He prayed and taught, and when he saw the signs of an awakening, he called a

great nation-wide meeting. He could not only pray but he could read the signs of the times. "Gather all Israel to Mizpeh and I will pray for you." What a glorious commentary on the life of Samuel! The whole nation gathered to hear him pray! Great throngs have hung upon the words of preachers whose lips have been touched by living fire from the altars of God, and thousands have come together to listen to some sweet singer of Israel, but a nation assembled to hear Samuel pray! A day of fasting and prayer, a nation upon its knees, brought there by the praying of one earnest man.

People may be sinful and backslidden, but they believe in the praying of the godly man or woman. They believe with James: "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." When people really believe in the prayer-life of one of God's children, he has a power over them that can come in no other way. Israel believed in the praying of Samuel. They may not always have said so, they may have even jested about it some times, but they believed in the man whom they knew really prayed.

The Philistines heard of the gathering, and thought their underlings might be planning something, so they came up with great power. The trembling Israelites saw the threatening danger and cried unto Samuel: "Cease not to cry unto the Lord our God for us, that he will save us out of the hand of the Philistines." Think of it! A terror-stricken despairing people, building their hopes upon the prayers of one man! That was all right when that man was a Samuel. Better that than:

> "Heathen heart that puts her trust
> In reeking tube and iron shard;
> All valiant dust that builds on dust,
> And guarding, calls not Thee to guard."

What a testing time! a nation hung on the supplication of one man in that fateful hour! "And Samuel cried unto the Lord for Israel, and the Lord heard him." The test of a man's praying is the answer that comes, and Samuel's praying stood the test. The God of Samuel heard him, and the prayers of the prophet were mightier than the embattled hosts of Philistia. The enemy were defeated and Israel came back to Jehovah. "The Lord heard him." A long story is summed up in those few words that sound so commonplace and easy, but much of it must be read between the lines. Samuel was on right terms with God; he did not have a lot of repenting to do before he could pray; and he did not have to pray long. Most of our trouble about praying is getting ready. Samuel was ready. There was no time for long prayers that day; Israel was cowed and helpless and the Philistine army was right upon them. Any prayer that helped Israel must be answered at once. Some wait for an emergency before they get ready to pray, and the time is too short. Speedy answers come to those who are prepared to pray. There was perfect understanding between Samuel and his God. Samuel knew Jehovah, and better still Jehovah knew Samuel. It means much when the man who prays and the God who must answer are well acquainted.

The man who wants God in a time of urgent need must not have a lot of things to make right before he can pray. There is much in being well practiced in good things. Many people try to use God as most of us use a fireman or a policeman. We pay very little attention to those guardians of the public welfare until a burglar breaks into our home, or the house catches fire. Then we want them and want them very quickly. We have all seen church members who paid little attention to God when all was going well,

when health was good, the purse full and business flourishing. But when adversity crowded in upon them, when sickness hovered over the home, when the crape was on the door, or when all their plans and air-castles were in the dust, they called upon God and wondered why He did not hear them. It seems hard to say, but it is a blessing that God does not answer under such conditions. Nothing could be more hurtful than for God's favors to be at the beck and call of such praying. The way into the inner sanctuary is the way of holy living and constant communion. To answer under any other conditions would be to put a premium upon sinful neglect, and give the keys of the treasury to those who would "consume it upon their lusts."

Samuel did not belong to that class. He had no trouble to adjust with his heavenly Father, no backslidings to confess, no idols to cast out. It means more to a country to have a man like that in authority, than to have a full treasury or a standing army.

This meeting was the thing for which he had toiled and prayed. His fondest dream had been to see his people gather once more about the altars of Jehovah. The soul of Samuel thrilled with joy when the people cried, "We have sinned against Jehovah," for in that confession he saw the first sign of the coming restoration. Contrition and repentance are the first clouds that betoken a revival, and Samuel knew that the time of victory had come.

It was no new thing for Samuel to pray for the nation. The morning watch had found him upon his knees, the sun at high noon had looked upon his bowed head, and the evening shadows knew his place of prayer. Many a time at the midnight hour God and Samuel had talked together about the wayward nation. Yes, Samuel could pray for

Israel; praying was easy now. The hard time had been when he prayed long and earnestly, and looked out each morning to see the fresh smoke from strange altars, and the tides of sin still running full.

No people can measure the worth of their Samuels. The prayers of God's prophets are the towers and bulwarks of any nation. The cause of God travels on the knees of suppliants, and the milestones of its progress are the closets of its intercessors. The real Ebenezer was not the stone they erected after the great deliverance, but the spot that marked the beginning of victory was the prayer altar of Samuel.

What a triumph! A nation turned back to God, a whole people prayed back to God and righteousness! Someone will say, "That was a wonderful prayer that Samuel offered that day!" But the praying of that hour never stirred the heart of Samuel or reached the ear of God, like those lonely hours of earnest intercession. It may seem to the shallow observer as if the prayer of that day was answered and the others were not, but that is an error. The manifestation of divine power was an answer to more than the people heard. It was the harvest of ten thousand prayers known only to God and Samuel. For years they had been working together to bring about that hour. Prayers like those of Samuel are never forgotten; they are treasured in the "golden vials full of odors which are the prayers of the saints." God had been answering all the while.

Samuel shared the usual fate of reformers. When the people were safe and prosperous once more, the man who brought it to pass was neglected. Samuel was all right while the nation was in trouble, when the sword of the Philistine was red with the blood of their children, and

his heel was upon their necks, but in the time of their prosperity they wanted something else.

The Hebrews began looking at the surrounding nations and became discontented. They were caught by the glamor of royalty, and fascinated by the pomp and pageantry of kings. They wanted to be like other folk, they wanted someone to lead them in battle; and while Samuel upon his knees had brought them victory, he was no imposing figure to the world. They wanted a king. They yearned for the clank of armor, and all the trappings and equipage of war. They were looking for some stately presence with plumed helmet and prancing war horse to lead the armies of Israel. Of course they had been victorious under the leadership of Samuel, but the times had changed and they must change with them. They could not point with boastful pride to the plain figure of the old prophet and his simple dress, and tell their neighbors that he was their leader; there was not enough impressiveness in that. The heathen would shrug their shoulders and smile. The Israelites wanted to dazzle the eyes and excite the imagination of their neighbors.

The sons of Jacob decided that it was out of style to win battles in the way that old Samuel did. They were prosperous now and could afford to keep up with the procession. God wanted them to be a peculiar people, but they did not want to be peculiar. It was so much easier and much more comfortable to be like other folk. The devil is a great psychologist and has worked that trait of human nature for all that it is worth. He has made thousands of Christians far more anxious to follow the customs of men than to be in favor with God.

It mattered little that the Philistines had "the hand of the Lord against them all the days of Samuel." They

would rather be defeated now and then, than to win their victories in that old-fashioned way. The fact is, when they got up in the world a bit, the Philistines were not such a bad sort, when you understood them.

So Samuel and Samuel's God were rejected. Samuel was human and felt deeply all that this meant, but he sorrowed most of all for the deluded people. It was at this point that the true greatness of Samuel shone out; there was not a word of personal complaint. Samuel was more concerned about his people than about himself. Besides he had learned the true estimate of worldly honors, and how fleeting was the glamor of fame. According to his custom, he talked things over with God, and when he knew His will, cheerfully carried it out.

The prophet was not abashed or humiliated by the turn of events. He was a man of genuine heroism. Real praying builds stalwart integrity, and true integrity is the essence of the most dependable valor. If you would know the fiber of the man, read his farewell address, when he formally surrendered his judgeship to the chosen king. How his voice must have rung out as he challenged the nation to lay a finger upon one crooked act, a single perversion of justice. Awed by his majestic character and pricked in their consciences by the sense of the wrong they had committed, they once more asked him to pray for them. In this they unwittingly paid the loftiest tribute to the real godliness of Samuel. When one man asks another to pray for him, he avows his confidence in the inner life of that man. He says in substance: "I believe you are on good terms with God, that you are God's man and He will hear you." The undying greatness of the real Samuel is revealed in that memorable reply: "God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you."

Rejected and relegated to obscurity, Samuel is neither soured nor ugly. He will live just as he has lived, and will pray just as he has prayed. He had prayed through the years of his boyhood, and during those dark days at Shiloh. He had prayed for the nation while they were in the depths of their backsliding. He had prayed until repentance and reformation crowned the long years of supplication; and he is not going to stop. His interest and prayers do not depend upon what people think or how they treat him. It matters little to the man who walks with God, about transitory things; that man has the far look, he has gotten the sense of eternal values, and can walk unmoved by the petty annoyances of life.

Yes, Samuel is going to pray on just as if nothing had happened. God's real helpers are more concerned about doing their duty, than they are about what men do to them. The man who is faithful to God and His cause does not have to worry about his reputation and standing among men. Samuel will pray on; to cease would be sin. He has put his life in line with the plan and purpose of God as represented in Israel and he will pray on till God calls him home.

So it came to pass that the man who prayed and would not stop, remained through life the mightiest force in the Hebrew nation. He was the bulwark of the throne of Saul so long as he remained faithful to Jehovah, and when that ill-fated ruler failed, it was Samuel who anointed his successor. Samuel upon his knees was mightier than Saul upon his throne, surrounded by his fawning courtiers. Had it not been for the influence of the praying prophet, the failure of Saul's reign might well have wrought ruin to the kingdom; but Samuel prayed on, and God used him to usher in the grandeur of David and the glory of Solo-

mon. Until the day of his death he remained God's silent prime minister—the uncrowned king-maker of Israel.

Samuel prayed on until the end, and during all of that time was the most potent force for holiness in the nation. The man will never be down and out who knows how to pray on. He will never be overcome, because he has laid hold upon the forces which know no defeat. Samuel was never on the shelf; his usefulness did not come to an end with his old age; not even death put an end to his work. His labors remained and their power was felt through all the life of the Jewish people. God's heroes are the men and women who pray, who pray when the days are dark and there is not a single rift in the clouds, when the foe seems to triumph and all the host of God seems cowering in defeat; who pray till the tide turns, and then pray on till the call comes from on high.

Samuel was not brilliant. He was never sensational nor spectacular, but he was strong in that serene strength that comes to those who walk with God. He was not a lawgiver, or a statesman. He wrote no songs, and so far as we know, preached no sermons. His strength lay in the fact that he prayed, and when the answer was delayed he prayed, when the day of triumph dawned he prayed, and when rejected and set aside by men he simply prayed, *prayed*, and *prayed on.*

Chapter VI

THE KING WHO PRAYED DOWN TWO KINGS

IT is not often that a king is a good, praying man, for piety does not usually thrive in the pomp and luxury of a palace. We expect prophets and patriarchs to live in an atmosphere of devotion, but we do not look for deep religious life on the part of men of royal lineage. For some reason, living in regal grandeur and exercising unlimited authority is not conducive to consecrated living. The heroes of faith have been more numerous in dens and caves of the earth than in princely mansions.

Hezekiah was an exception to the rule. We do not know how it happened that the son of wicked Ahaz was so godly a man. This much however is true, Hezekiah was one of the mighty men of prayer in the divine record. He began his reign well. A good start counts for much in the race. It seemed to be his purpose from the beginning to bring his erring people back to Jehovah, and any one with a task like that will feel the need of praying much and often. Hezekiah was a reformer, and real reformers must not only defeat the devil and his forces, but what is sometimes harder, they must stir the souls of sluggish comrades and quicken the courage of cowardly saints.

There is a wonderful sentence about Hezekiah in the eighteenth chapter of 2 Kings: "He trusted in the Lord God of Israel; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him. For he clave to the Lord and departed not from following him, but kept his commandments, which the Lord commanded

Moses." "He trusted—he clave—and departed not—but kept his commandments." These are big words, far bigger than they look in print. They tell of a tenacity of purpose and moral resolution which mark a history-making man.

A king with piety enough to resist all the temptations to ease and luxury found in an Eastern court, and then to lead his people in a great religious awakening, is worth looking over with care. The work of such men is not an accident. All such movements are the children of prayer and toil; they are born in the closet and nourished by careful teaching and example. The price of such enterprises is paid in soul agony, through long hours of intercession, and in painstaking and unremitting labor.

Hezekiah boldly put down idolatry, cleansed the temple and restored the worship which had been neglected and corrupted. All this demanded force of character and moral courage of the highest order. He sent his proclamation all over the land calling the people back to the worship of Jehovah, and urging their attendance upon the great national festivals. Out through all Judah and among the remnant of people left in the devastated land of Israel, the influence and work of Hezekiah was felt. The people responded with enthusiasm and the result was a great national revival.

The work Hezekiah did was not all smooth sailing. Just when it looked like everything was going well, the cruel Assyrian invader from the East cast his shadow over the land. There were no armies upon earth like those hordes of Assyria. No foe had been able to stand before them, and no walled city had been strong enough to protect its inhabitants from the grim phalanx of the conquering Semites. They rolled over the land like a devastating flood, city and country alike going down before them.

Ruin and desolation marked their progress, while famine and pestilence followed where their armies trod. Hezekiah saw the evil day and tried to escape. Once he bought them off, but the Assyrians were not content with tribute alone. They came into the land with loud threat and blatant boast. Jehovah was flouted and the people of Jerusalem derided for trusting in Him. It was an hour of darkness.

Hezekiah's kingdom was not only in danger, his life was likely to pay forfeit, and all the work that he had done for the restoration of the worship of Jehovah be blotted out. There were no armies upon earth strong enough to stand before this militant, conquering host, and Hezekiah knew it only too well.

Imagine Hezekiah as he called his counsellors together and read them the blasphemous threat of the haughty invader. No doubt there were shaking of heads, and expressions of fear, while the timid and cowardly were secretly making plans for the saving of their own lives. Young Hezekiah must have sat among them with a heavy heart. He had been doing his best for Jehovah, his fondest hope, his loftiest aim had been to bring his people in line with God's great purposes. He felt that he was part of the design and plan of God that was being worked out through the nation, and he was heart-broken at the thought of seeing his work undone, his beloved city given over to the spoiler, and the holy temple plundered and desecrated. Well he knew what the ruthless despoiler would do, and he thought of his people who had followed him with such single-hearted devotion, until his soul was shaken to its depths. The council closed with nothing accomplished and none of his advisers had anything to offer in this hour of black despair.

Would that we might have seen Hezekiah as he walked slowly out of the council chamber with the hateful parchment crackling in his hand! No doubt he pondered deeply, "Where shall I turn? What shall I do?"

In this hour of dire extremity, he did what God's real men and women have always done, he fell back upon the promise and power of Jehovah. Hezekiah knew the promise of Jehovah to defend His people when they were faithful, and he knew that he had been loyal. He had cast his lot with Jehovah and His work, and he was going to ask for the fulfilment of His promise. He was going to ask for the biggest thing he could think of God doing. There were no armies in all the world like those mighty cohorts that threatened him, but with the heroism of a dauntless faith he was going to defy them and put Jehovah to the test. He had given all and dared all, and when all earthly hopes had failed, he would stretch out the hand of faith and reach for the grasp of the Infinite.

The temple was silent; the priests had finished their work and gone. Hezekiah was alone; not even Isaiah, the statesman-prophet, was there; just Hezekiah and God. One man, who had been trying to do the will of God; one man, with the burden of a nation upon his shoulders, the cause of God upon his heart; just one man, God's man, coming in the last dark hour to claim His promise!

Think about the lonely king as he knelt upon the polished stones of the temple floor, with the scoffing parchment rustling in his hand as he spread it out before God. There was never a more sincere, child-like, trusting prayer in all the history of supplication than went up from that disconsolate heart. It was not primarily Hezekiah, but Jehovah who had been defied. The Assyrian had declared that Jehovah was like other gods, and made the ar-

rogant boast that his gods were mightier than the Jehovah of Israel.

But let us listen to that prayer there in the silent temple: "O Lord God of Israel, which dwelleth between the cherubim, thou art God, even thou alone of all the kingdoms of earth; thou has made heaven and earth. Lord, bow down thine ear and hear; open, Lord, thine eyes, and see; and hear the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent him to reproach the living God. Of a truth, Lord, the kings of Assyria have destroyed the nations and their lands, and have cast their gods into the fire; for they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone; therefore have they destroyed them. Now therefore, O Lord our God, I beseech thee, save thou us out of his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the Lord God, even thou only" (2 Kings 19:15-19).

I maintain that this is a remarkable prayer. It reveals that Hezekiah had firmly fixed in his mind the great central truth of Israel's world message—the fact of one, true, eternal, invisible, omnipotent Jehovah, creator of the heavens and the earth. Here was no puny, tribal god, that some would have us believe was the Hebrew conception of Jehovah. Let the man who claims that their idea of God was limited and narrow explain the prayer of Hezekiah. Here we have Jehovah exalted to His rightful place as the creator, director and preserver of all things. Here is the unshaken assertion that He only is God, and that all the gods of the nations that Sennacherib had destroyed were only wood and stone, "dumb idols, the work of men's hands."

The haughty destroyer has thrown down the gauntlet to Jehovah, and the appeal of Hezekiah is for the vindication

of His name. There is no word of fright or terror, no cowardly whine of danger, but an appeal made in simple faith, that the world may learn that Jehovah alone is God.

Get the scene: one man, God's man, the anointed leader of His people, the one ruler among all the nations who was standing for Him, was staking his life and his kingdom upon His covenant promise. Something must be done with a prayer and a suppliant like that. The issue was plain and clear; it was not Hezekiah, but the God of Hezekiah who was defied. Hezekiah has brought Him the challenge, has made his prayer, declared his faith in the almighty, ever-living Jehovah, and left the defiance at His feet.

There is no more sublime picture in the religious records of our race than this. Hezekiah has made faith's last appeal. He has taken the last step that a man of God can take. He has appealed his case to the supreme court of the universe. He has raised his voice to the Infinite for the protection of the helpless, and the vindication of righteousness. God would have been untrue to His holy nature, to all that He has promised the sons of men, if that prayer went unheeded.

The lonely Hezekiah went down from the temple after that prayer with the living God by his side, and all the embattled hosts of the unseen escorting him with banners. What an hour! What a victory! The host of Sennacherib was doomed when Hezekiah arose from his knees in the shadowy temple. The die was cast, the alliance with heaven was complete. Every angel, every seraph, every flaming archangel of the unconquerable host of the skies was encamped about Hezekiah and Jerusalem. The kingdom was safe, the temple was protected, the worship of Jehovah would not perish from the earth.

"For the angel of God spread his wings on the blast,
And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed;
And the breath of the sleepers waxed deadly and chill,
Their hearts but once heaved and forever grew still."

The armies of the aliens had been put to flight by the prayer of faith, and this alone would have marked Hezekiah as one of the masters in the holy art of supplication.

We find, however, another great example of answered prayer in the life of King Hezekiah. In the midst of his plans and activities, this praying man was suddenly smitten down by disease. We do not know why this sad experience came, but perhaps he had become just a bit exalted. God had delivered him from the hosts of Assyria, and he had possibly come to feel himself proof against whatever might assail him. Poor, weak, human nature will become proud even of its saintship some times, and Hezekiah was no exception. Maybe this sickness was part of the divine discipline, that he might not forget the source of his strength. For whatever reason, Hezekiah was brought down to the gates of death. The grim king of the grinning skull and the empty sockets, and the bony hands came and sat upon the foot of his bed, and Hezekiah looked into the pitiless face of the great enemy. The friend and counselor of his life, Isaiah, the evangelical prophet, came to say: "Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die and not live." This was a rude shock, coming as it did in the midst of his unfinished work. Again we see the simple-hearted devotion of the man. His life has been a life of prayer, and he turns to God like a hurt child seeking its mother's arms. There is no intimation that he feared death, but his life work was unfinished and there was no son to succeed him on the throne.

Of course he wanted to live, but life to Hezekiah meant

the service of Jehovah, the strengthening of the faith of Judah in Him, and the making stronger of the ties that bound them to the God of their fathers. Hezekiah longed to complete the work which he had begun; an unfinished task was staring him in the face. There is wondrous simplicity in such of the prayer as is recorded for us. In it he pleads his honest loyalty to Jehovah, and declares that he has been sincere in all his efforts. There is no direct plea for longer life, but the thread of pathetic appeal runs all through it and the desire to finish his work is transparent all the way. Here we have God's faithful man praying for more time to work for righteousness and to complete the task to which he had set his hand.

We are told that before Isaiah had gone out into the middle court, "the word of the Lord came to him, saying, Turn again, and tell Hezekiah, the captain of my people, Thus saith the Lord, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears; behold, I will heal thee; on the third day thou shalt go up unto the house of the Lord. And I will add unto thy days fifteen years; and I will deliver this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria" (2 Kings 20:4-6). Thus the man whose trusting prayer brought the legions of the skies to smite the invaders of his country, drove back the angel of death by the simple cry of his soul unto Him who holds the issues of life.

Much has been written about praying for the sick, and very much of it has been unwise, but there are certain truths taught in the Word which we cannot ignore.

We are commanded to pray for the sick, and we have assurance that the sick have been raised up in answer to prayer, but all such praying must be submitted to the will and wisdom of a loving Father. We have no right to ask God to spare life to no purpose. A life that has its place

in kingdom work, a life with its task unfinished, may well be an object of earnest prayer. We have no right to expect an answer, if the prayer is prompted simply by the fear of death, or the desire to enjoy longer days. It is true here, as in all other praying, the selfish element must be left out, and God and His will be first.

The prayer that is answered does not ignore the known means of healing. Isaiah commanded that a poultice of figs be put on the boil, clearly teaching that God would use all the healing agencies at hand in the fulfilment of His promise. Pray for the sick? Yes, and get the best physician to be found. God does nothing that we can do for ourselves. He has filled the world with remedies for bodily diseases, and He expects us to use them. It is folly to pray and ignore the means of healing He has provided.

There is no place or condition of life where the child of God may not pray. Pray when mighty obstacles loom in the way, pray till the path opens through the waves, or the mountains be cast into the sea. Pray when the enemies of righteousness seem to triumph, pray until the unseen helpers from Jehovah camp about His children. Pray when death threatens and the skeleton hand seeks to claim lives that belong to God and His cause. Hezekiah prayed and the armies of aliens were swept away by the breath of Jehovah's power. He prayed again and the king of terrors sheathed his sword and did not come back for fifteen years. The man who does his best for God can pray; more than that, no man can do his best without prayer.

When a man has gone to the limit of human strength in doing God's work, he may ask for anything which he needs, either for victory or protection. At the time when things that are too big for him intervene, he can seek and obtain more than human aid, and all the powers of the

principalities in heavenly places will be subject to the compelling urgency of his prayer. The idler, the time-server, the compromiser, or the coward cannot pray in that way. True prayer is laborious, careless of personal interests, loyal to the truth and willing to risk all and dare all for God. The company to which the Hezekiahs belong have the key to the inner chamber of God's presence, but it is not cheaply bought. They have the protection of that power at whose breath the armies of aliens perish, but they have thrown away all other trust and walked in the dark with God. Because of this, they have been able to win victories that were humanly impossible, to turn back the lifted hand of the king of terrors, and to close the doorway to the chambers of the grave.

Hezekiah was not a man of outstanding ability. He did not lead his armies to victory as other kings of his line had done. Nor did he extend the borders of his kingdom and magnify its position among the nations. His chief contribution to the life of his people was religious. He knew how to link up with the purposes and plans of God. He was not able to stand before the mighty conquerors of his day, but he knew how to ally himself with powers before whom they were as chaff before a hurricane. The unseen might of the Omnipotent was commanded by his child-like faith until he could truly say to his people, "For there be more with us than with them." He could not stay the poised dart of the great enemy, but he could turn his face to the wall and talk with One who was able to send the grim tyrant away empty handed.

Chapter VII

STOPPING THE MOUTHS OF LIONS

IN that roll call of Old Testament heroes and heroines in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, it is said there were those who by faith "stopped the mouths of lions." Those whom the Holy Spirit has placed upon the honor roll of God's unchanging record are well worth our study. The story told in the sixth chapter of Daniel is one of childhood's classics from Holy Writ, and the hero is one of history's immortals. The narrative begins with the first captivity, when Jehoiakim and many of the nobles of Judea were carried to Babylon.

The first time we find young Daniel, he is a prisoner in the metropolis of the world. Judea had been conquered, the holy city plundered, and the temple desecrated. The choicest of the people were exiles, a nation without a country. Every trace of national glory was gone and it seemed as if the worship of Jehovah might perish from the earth. The boy was of royal lineage, gifted, ambitious and aspiring. The blood of David and Solomon coursed his veins. He had doubtless been reared in luxury and taught to look forward to a life of affluence and ease. But all his life prospects had been rudely shattered by the war which overthrew his country, and he suddenly found himself a captive in the magnificent city of Babylon, the capital of the vast Chaldean empire. It was a new world into which he had been transplanted, and the task of adjusting life to the new conditions must have been difficult.

He had spent his life, up to this time, in Jerusalem, where everything had centered about the worship of the holy temple. His associations had all been among a people whose national existence was moulded and directed by their religion. He found himself in Babylon, the center of the world, where all the habits and manner of life were entirely different. In that imperial city the name of Jehovah was unheard, and the words of His binding and holy law unknown. There was a freedom from moral restraint, a laxity of life which he had never known. Jerusalem had been a city apart, her populace almost wholly of the sons of Abraham. Babylon was cosmopolitan; people of every nation thronged her wide streets and made their homes behind her towering walls.

Everything was new; everything was strange. All that he saw was bigger and on a vaster scale than he had ever known. The armies of the Chaldeans marched down the streets with the stride of world conquerors. The people moved and spoke as those who were the lords of the earth.

What the first environment of Daniel's captivity was we are not told, but great confusion must have filled the mind of this eager-eyed young captive as he struggled to get his bearings. We know that Daniel was included in the number chosen, when king Nebuchadnezzar ordered that "certain of the children of Israel, and of the king's seed, and of the princes; children in whom was no blemish, but well-favored and skilful in all wisdom, cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had ability in them to stand in the king's palace" should be selected to be trained in all the learning and knowledge of the Chaldeans.

Here was a chance to escape serfdom, the opportunity for a life of ease and comfort. Every dictate of worldly prudence would have said, "Do nothing to spoil this wonderful advantage. The door of escape from cruel slavery has opened, do nothing rash or foolish which might cause it to close." Death, or at least galling bondage, might easily be the price of raising any question with a cruel and despotic monarch like Nebuchadnezzar.

It was a crucial hour. Young Daniel had been taught from his earliest memory to revere and obey the law of Jehovah. Now he was called upon to decide whether he would cleave to the faith of his fathers and the regulations of his religion, or lay them aside for the favor of the great king. It was a testing ordeal for the young captive. There was no one to whom he might go for counsel; there were no older men upon whose strength he might lean. Let no one think that the decision was easy; Daniel well knew the peril of defying the mighty monarch. He had seen the ruthlessness of the Chaldean rulers too often to have any illusions. But without the least bravado, and with a calmness beyond his years, this princely boy purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself. Unquestionably the struggle was longer and far more difficult than might be inferred from the brief record. There were doubtless long and bitter hours when conscience wrestled with the dictates of worldly wisdom.

But the matter was settled between Daniel and Jehovah; whatever the cost, he would keep the faith. God and His law would not be forgotten. Jerusalem and her temple, the prophets and the law, and not Bel and Babylon, would be the keepers of his life.

When a man makes a decision like that, and links himself up in such fashion with the Most High, he becomes

in an unusual sense God's man. He has taken his destiny out of his own hands, and placed it in the keeping of Him who marshals the stars and holds the seas in the hollow of His hand. Ezekiel speaks of God looking for a man and finding none, but God found a man that day in Babylon. And when God finds His man, He may test him in many ways, He may temper him in the fires of a thousand furnaces, but He will never forsake him.

Daniel prayed! Of course he prayed! A prayerless heart could never have made that decision. Such a choice was the very essence of prayer. It said, "I am going with Jehovah; all my present and my future are staked upon His word and covenant." This was the beginning of a wonderful prayer life. It is according to God's method of doing, that the man who casts away all for Him shall have the right of way into the inner circle of His favor.

Daniel's habits of prayer were fixed and regular. All through that wonderful and varied career, under succeeding monarchs and through shifting empires, he walked with Jehovah in the faith and hope of that first decision.

The crowning test of his eventful life came toward its close. When age had whitened his locks and the day was waning toward eventide, he was called upon once more to choose as he had chosen in the days of his youth.

His manner of life was well known. His foes paid the loftiest possible tribute to his integrity, when they decided that the only way to work his ruin was to involve some question "concerning the law of his God." It is a heartening and inspiring experience to study the record of a man whose bitterest foes built their plot for his ruin upon the fact that he would pray, and that he would not change his manner of prayer to save his life.

When that royal decree went forth that none should pray, save to the arrogant monarch, and fixed a horrible death as the penalty for violation, it made not the slightest difference to Daniel. His battle had been fought long ago. The decision was already rendered and there were no weary hours of perplexity. Only the weak and vacillating suffer at such a time.

There is something pathetically sublime in his praying before that window which opened toward Jerusalem. He had been away from the place of his fathers many long years. The home-land was desolate, Jerusalem was a ruin, the temple was an ash heap; yet three times every day his window opened toward the beloved spot, and his prayer went up to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. His faith was fixed in the restoration of the city and temple, and in that faith he had ordered his life. It mattered not to him that the Chaldeans and the Medo-Persians ruled the earth, and that Israel was like the wild heath tossed by the desert winds; Jehovah lived, and His promise was unshaken. Pray in the face of the king's commandment! Yes, he had been praying all these years in the midst of heathendom and this was no time to stop. He had prayed before when life and death hung in the balance. Of course he will pray! He could not live without it. The thing with which he was confronted was only an incident to a faith like that of Daniel. He had prayed through long years of shadows, thick and starless, but hope had not died and he had not surrendered.

He had learned to walk alone, so far as human companionship was concerned, but the man who walks alone with God has royal company. There were very few at Daniel's prayer meetings—just God and Daniel—but the services went on as usual. It would have taken more than

decrees and lions to break them up. All the powers of darkness did not make one quiver in that quiet voice before the open window. The spies of the enemy were lurking about, but he did not change his place of prayer, nor draw a single curtain over that casement. There was nothing for Daniel to settle. All the things which most men have to arrange at such times had long been fixed with him.

The edict of Darius was a challenge to Jehovah, and Daniel knew it. He knew all about the subtle greed-inspired malice which lay behind the decree, but he stood for Jehovah in Babylon, and with quiet dignity he picked up the gauntlet which hate and arrogance had thrown down.

Daniel was ready to die for the faith that had sustained him all those years, but God was not ready to have him die. He had championed the cause of his Lord against an empire, and He was not going to let him sleep alone among the lions. Daniel was safer in that savage lair with God, than Darius in his palace guarded by ten thousand soldiers. His sleep was sweeter with a lion for a pillow, than that of the impotent monarch upon a bed of down. The hand of God was over every fanged mouth, and His protection was mightier than the talons of the king of beasts.

Yes, the praying of God's prophet stopped the mouths of lions. But it was real praying, there was no easy-going mediocrity about it. If you would know the kind of praying that closed the mouths of the cruel beasts, read the ninth chapter of Daniel. Listen as he tells us something about his praying: "And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fastings and sackcloth and ashes; and I prayed unto the Lord God and

made my confession and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him and keep his commandments" (Dan. 9:3, 4). This was more than ordinary praying; there was worship, reverence and awe before the majesty and holiness of Jehovah; there was humble confession, with an intense plea for mercy upon the wayward people. No example of prayer, more real, importunate and imploring, is to be found in any record.

Hear him again: "O Lord, to us belongeth confusion of face, to our kings, to our princes, to our fathers, because we have sinned against thee. To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgiveness, though we have rebelled against him" (Dan. 9:8,9). And again: "O my God, incline thine ear, and hear; open thine eyes and behold our desolations, and the city which is called by thy name; for we do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousnesses, but for thy great mercies. O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for thine own sake, O my God; for thy city and thy people are called by thy name" (Dan. 9:18, 19). Those who would be skilled in the art of supplication may well study this most remarkable prayer. When one who is God's real servant casts himself upon His mercy after this fashion, something happens. Daniel's God is a God of mercy, and a prayer like this enters His ears. Daniel tells us: "And while I was speaking, and praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the Lord my God for the holy mountain of my God; yea, whiles I was speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation" (Dan. 9: 20, 21). While

he was yet speaking the answer came. The messenger of God sped on quickened wings, for a prayer like that commands the swiftest response that heaven can give.

Here was no formal phraseology, no fixed and mechanical use of words, but a heart broken and contrite over the plight of his people. All the sacrifice that Daniel brought was a soul humbled and penitent over sin, a heart broken and sorrowful before God.

The same conditions call for the same kind of praying now. There is no path to the favor of God save the one that Daniel trod. Heart-breaking penitence, honest confession, thorough amendment of life, are the highways to restored favor and divine blessing.

> "Still stands thine ancient sacrifice,
> A humble and a contrite heart."

But the man who prayed meant more than the words which he uttered. It were well to glance at him again. He was a man who, in the springtime of life, with the dew of morning fresh upon his soul, had risked all for Jehovah and His law; a man who had prayed without shame and without ostentation, without temple, priest, or comrade, through long and lonesome years. He was a man who when age had crowned him with hoary hairs, defied earth's mightiest monarch, and did not shrink from the roaring, slavering lions athirst for blood. He was the man who had prayed on while the spies of his enemies dogged his footsteps, and the ravening beasts made night hideous with their hungry clamor. That man could be heard while yet speaking.

All through the divine record, the men whom God answered in an unusual way were those who were willing to stand alone, and if need be perish for God. No one who was unwilling to be God's man all the way, or to put

all that he possessed and all that he was into His work, is named among those who had the ear of the Most High. This was true of Moses, in a peculiar way it was true of Elijah, and it was gloriously true of Daniel.

Though Daniel had been approaching Jehovah for a lifetime, he never lost the feeling of holy wonder and reverential awe when coming into His presence. He was always prone in the dust in spirit, if not in body, when he spoke to his God. Victorious, conquering prayer never bears the stamp of self-righteousness, or pleads any human worth. The believer who has learned the way through Christ to the mercy seat, has also learned the frailty and futility of human merit, and brings his sacrifice of contrition and confession to the foot of the throne.

Humility, penitence, confession, and sacrifice, these are the marks of the prayers of the prevailing saints. They are not the signs of weakness, but of strength. Daniel put his face in the dust before Jehovah, but his cheek did not blanch at the wrath of Darius. He sobbed like a heart-broken child when he knelt before his God, but faced without the quiver of a nerve the jaws of the hungry lions. He opened his windows that all men might know that he prayed, and the prayer from those untrembling lips echoed about the throne of Omnipotence. No wonder the Holy Spirit registered his achievements on the foremost file of the heroes of faith.

A mighty man in statecraft, a scholar, skilled in all the learning of his day, a prophet of the Most High; but greatest of all a prince in prayer, an adept in the holiest of all the holy arts, who "by faith stopped the mouths of lions."

Chapter VIII

JESUS AND THE PRACTICE OF PRAYER

WE have tried to learn something from the experiences of those who have won great prayer victories. Now for a little time let us come to the feet of Him whose word is the final authority in this holy attainment. We shall not attempt an extensive discussion of the Master's teaching, but come as the disciples upon one occasion saying, "Lord, teach us to pray."

I. *His teaching by example.* Jesus lived a normal prayer life. Everything which goes to make up the complete circle of prayer was found there in perfect symmetry. Of course we cannot enter into or understand the full relations of the Son with the Father during the limitations of His earthly career, but we may learn something of what the place of prayer in our lives should be.

Why He must pray, the things for which He prayed, and even the ground of His approach to the Father, will always have their mysteries for us, but we know that His life was one of incessant prayer. No doubt it was one of the avenues through which the incarnate Son maintained fellowship with the Father, but we know little save the outstanding fact.

His great seasons of prayer were in loneliness apart from His disciples. None of them were fitted to be His prayer comrades. They could not enter into His perfect fellowship, and their sin-clouded lives could not know the sweetness and delight of an approach to the Father with never a shadow or the memory of a shadow between them. There was upon His part no confession of sin, no

plea for forgiveness, no cry for mercy, during all the long hours which He spent alone with the Father.

The significant fact that we would impress is that our Lord prayed and prayed much. Not only were there times of holy fellowship, when the human nature of our Lord was made strong for His stupendous tasks, but there were periods of mighty intercession. No one ever prayed for this old world just like Jesus did. He saw, as no other eyes had ever seen, the horrible bondage and degradation of the race which He had come to save. The work of redemption, with all that it meant, as well as the obstacles in the way, were ever before Him. These things must have been part of the objects of His supplications. He prayed in all the great epochs of His life. He was praying when the Spirit came upon Him at His baptism; and it was while praying, that the glory that was His before the world was, shined through its earthly veil on the mount of transfiguration; and He prayed at the climax of His miracles by the grave of Lazarus.

He prayed much for those men who were to be His representatives on earth after He should go away. During all the years that they walked with Him they were ever upon His heart. He found time while the sorrows of Gethsemane were pouring their first tides upon His soul to pray for the vacillating Peter, and give utterance to that greatest of recorded prayers as given in the seventeenth chapter of John. In this prayer we get a glimpse of the objects which seemed most worthwhile to Him as He talked with the Father. How that prayer swept about and enfolded that little band of loving, yet bewildered men, who sat with Him about that table; and how the memory of it must have thrilled and made strong their hearts through many long and eventful years. And not only were

they included, but that prayer with ever deepening intensity and ever widening tide, poured out through Jerusalem, and over Samaria, and on into every nation and tongue, until its kiss of love fell like a holy benediction upon every believer of every land and all time. It enshrouded the home at Bethany still redolent with the odor of Mary's gift; it saw the glory of Pentecost; it leaped the barrier of the centuries and counted the unnumbered host of John's apocalyptic vision, and lapped and swathed every one of them in the folds of His holy foreknowledge, and laid them in loving intercession before the Father's throne. It was a prayer that spanned the ages, and caught within the grasp of its love and knowledge, all the end and purpose of redemption, and each and every one of the redeemed.

Let us look for a moment at the prayer of Gethsemane. We may well put off our shoes and tread softly here for we are upon thrice-holy ground. There is no other prayer just like this prayer under the gray olive trees. All the powers of darkness had been unleashed, all the burden of our sin had been heaped together, until the horrible vileness, the unutterable shame, the nameless guilt of it amazed His soul. The pain, the abyssmal repulsiveness of the thing which He must bear, was in its nearness, almost unendurable to His stainless nature. In His spotless innocence there was such an abhorrence of the foul pollution of its slimy touch, that it seared His sinless heart like the flame of the undying lake. Even His more than human wisdom had not foreseen all the undiluted bitterness of the cup which was pressed to His lips. Yet, while all the holy energies of His outraged nature revolted, and His body writhed under the torture of His spirit until the bloody sweat marred His countenance and crimsoned His raiment, He prayed. Listen to the prayer that went up

from that lonely battleground: "Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me; nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt" (Mark 14:36). Here we have the one perfect example of submission to the Father's will. Here was the complete surrender of the incarnate Son to the will and purpose of the Father. No matter how thorny the path, how weighty the burden, or how unspeakably bitter the cup, there was no murmuring, no turning back. Here is our perfect pattern, our holy example. When we have learned to pray in the spirit of Gethsemane, we have entered into the realm where our Lord ever lived and moved.

Let us briefly look at one more of our Master's prayers. Gethsemane was over, the cross had come, hellish hate and murderous malice had brought Him to the tree. The jagged nails had torn His quivering flesh, and tortured nerves and straining sinews were supporting His pain-racked body; yet during this dark hour He prayed, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do."

Here was the full illustration of what our Lord meant when He said: "But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Matt. 5:44). He had taught His followers that they could not pray aright unless the spirit of forgiveness was in their hearts, and here was the perfect illustration of His meaning. He was suffering the most unjust and cruel wrongs that earth ever inflicted. He was enduring the most odious and brutal insults that it was possible to know, and this was His soul's response. Nothing can go beyond this prayer, nothing can add to it, and no one can misunderstand it. Here is His own living, breathing example of what He meant when He said: "As ye stand praying,

forgive." Kindness must be the answer to injury, love the response to malice, and forgiveness the echo to hate, if we would pray in the spirit of Jesus.

II. *His teaching by precept.* We do not expect to attempt an exposition of all that Jesus taught about the practice of prayer, but just to get a little appreciation of some of the things which He said.

Let us note the spirit and manner in which He said prayer must be approached: "And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are; for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men" (Matt. 6:5). This is in no sense meant to forbid public prayer. The emphasis is on the phrase, to "be seen of men." It means that prayer is not a sort of pietistic pose, but that it belongs to the deepest heart of the inner life. To go through the postures and forms of prayer, that men might see and applaud our devotion, would destroy all that prayer was intended to mean.

In this statement we have a call to simple sincerity, to holiness of purpose. The man who takes pleasure in repeating words that men may hear, and seeking places of prominence that men may see, is thinking little about God hearing or answering. In reality, the thing which Jesus condemns can have no place in genuine prayer. There is no room for such things as affectation, or desire for the admiration of men in sincere approach to God. Jesus warns us against counterfeiting the spirit of devotion with the base metal of love for the praise of men. He means that if we are going to have a God-consciousness, a sense of the presence of the Eternal, we will have no time for speculating about the opinions of our fellowmen. Prayer is a thing so big, so meaningful, that it calls for

every power of a human soul, and anything which does not do this is unworthy to be called prayer. A heart crying out for God, for the living God, will not be able to watch the passing parade, or look for the gleam of approbation in the eyes of fellow sinners. No thoughts of the staring rabble, or even of admiring saints, should crowd our minds when we seek the mercy seat; that is the time for heart hunger, honest desires and crystal clear sincerity.

"But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly" (Matt. 6:6). There are no long distance transactions in the field of prayer. God deals with men face to face, and heart to heart, or deals not at all. You cannot talk with the King and the crowd at the same time. The matters between you and God are too sacred and personal to be laid bare to the eyes of the multitude. Besides, prayer calls for such concentration, such rallying of all our powers, that it demands silence and the solitude of the inner chamber.

We are going to tell God things when we pray, which we will not, and for the very life of us, cannot tell in the crowd. There are secrets of our inner selves to be talked over, sins that sear and blight to be confessed. There are longings and hungerings of our deepest souls to whisper into the ear of God, about which we would not for anything speak to our dearest friend. Then God wants a real chance to speak to us. He wants no jarring sounds, no chattering voices, no hum of machinery, or clamor of commerce, when He would speak to a human soul.

Jesus did not mean that no one could pray unless in a closed and barred room, but He *did* mean that the door of mind and heart which shuts out the world and shuts

us up with God must be closed. The world, *all* the world, must be locked away from the holy things which happen there. "When thou hast shut thy door," when there is no one there but God and you, when you are all alone with Him, then pray. It is tremendously true that when we really pray, *no one is there but God and ourselves*, all else is without. When we pray, our dearest earthly friend is outside the door; he may be in the same pew, in the same room, but he is without the door. Every business affair is without; every allurement of the world, all the gold that glitters, all the jewels that sparkle, are outside that locked door, when we really pray. Not a distraction, not an alien sound! How quiet it must be in there! One can almost hear the beating of his heart and the rustle of his thoughts. That door is not made of wood or iron. It is the door of our will that closes, and says to all the world, "Out, out, out, I have great business on hand! I am engaged with the Almighty, out, out, keep out!" Alone with God!

What is on the inside of that door? Let us remember that some things are shut in as well as shut out. Inside, just inside that door, what is there? Just two of us are there. We with our sin, marring and staining us all over; we with our stinging conscience, and our unworthiness, we are there. Who else is there? God is there, the holy God, the One in the white light of whose presence no sin can live; God with His all-seeing eye; God who knows us through and through, right down to our inmost thought; God is there. Where shall we pray? Behind that closed door, alone with God. Who could be self-righteous before that radiant holiness? Who could dream of such a thing as hypocrisy or insincerity, where his whole being is illumined by the X-rays of Omniscience?

Not only will we tell God things that we do not tell in the crowd, God will speak to us there as He speaks no where else. It is in the inner chamber that we hear the love words with which He welcomes and pardons the prodigal. It is there that He makes us to sit in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. It is there that the victories are won for the coming of the kingdom. There will be answers that all men may see, but first must be the closed door with God. Alone with God! What else could one do there but pray, pray with the deepest sincerity, pray with the lowliest humility, with the most heart-breaking penitence? Alone with God—confessing, interceding, hearing the voice of His love, rejoicing in the light of His smile.

"But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions as the heathen do: for they think they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them, for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask him" (Matt. 6:7, 8). Our Lord declares the idea that many have that there is merit in the number, or the length of prayers, is heathenish. One short prayer like that of the publican with smitten heart and hanging head, or like the cry of Peter sinking beneath the waves, reaches higher and prevails more than a million prayers repeated by rote, or counted by fluttering wheels, or slipping beads.

Jesus taught *simplicity* in prayer. All greatness is pure and unadorned. Great men and women are simple folk. Great books are those which deal with the elemental things of life without pomp or fustian, and great prayers are unaffected and direct. God knows all the circumstances, and needs neither information nor exhortation. Child-like prayers, red-hot earnestness, pungent desires, mighty heart-longings, these are the things for which God is looking. Real prayer needs no neatly turned phrases or rounded

periods. There is more persuasion in a sob, more eloquence in a groan, more argument in a penitent confession, than in all the marshalled sentences or mechanical repetitions the world ever knew.

Jesus illustrated His meaning by giving an example of prayer. He did not mean for this to be slavishly followed, or repeated by rote, for that would violate the teachings which He had just given. This prayer reveals to us the true spirit of approach, the things upon which the emphasis of our prayers should be placed, and the state of mind and heart to make them availing. Men and women have been repeating this prayer for centuries; it has been chanted thousands of times and but seldom understood.

It is not the purpose of this writing to attempt any learned exposition of this remarkable prayer. Books and treatises almost without number have been written about it, and all the ground gone over by far abler pens. Our only hope is to say some things which may aid the average man or woman to have a little better understanding of the meaning and purpose of our Lord.

1. *It is a form of prayer for those who are already the children of God.* It is not a prayer for the sinner seeking pardon, but for the saved one who is trying to live as God's child. Jesus is showing such a one how to approach the Father when he comes to pray.

2. *The form of address*: "*Our Father.*" God is a father to His people in the fullest meaning of the word; all that the best earthly father can mean, and more, He is to His people. Not only is He the author of their being, the fountain of their spiritual life and strength; He also cares for them, provides for their needs, plans for their welfare, and disciplines them for their good. The basis of all prayer lies in the fact that behind all that we see there

is an infinite personality, and as a part of that personality a great Father heart that responds to the cry of need on the part of the creatures whom He has formed. All the love of an infinite Father, all the gracious and loving care which springs from a boundless and holy nature, He lavishes upon His people. So Jesus said, when you come to God, call Him "Father."

3. *"Hallowed be thy name."* God's name is holy. It is the expression in human speech of all that He is, and for that reason it is a thrice holy thing. That name must never be thought of lightly. It is something to command our loftiest reverence and our purest love. There is no place for flippancy of speech or careless familiarity when we address the Most High. This clause is more than a manner of approach, it is also a petition. It means that we desire that men shall regard the name of God in its true character, and that such a conception of His name is one of the greatest things for which we can pray. This is a cry that God may rightly reveal Himself to us, that we may so know Him that our hearts will say, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts." It is a petition that all men may have the right understanding of God and what His name means. It recognizes the fact that whenever men lightly regard the name of the divine Father, they are living a low spiritual life and have a weak grasp upon the things that make for righteousness. The honor of God's name has been the concern of all men who have been mighty in prayer. Elijah said, "I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts." Moses, in that great prayer in the thirty-second chapter of Exodus, was more concerned about the honor of Jehovah, than about either himself or Israel. God's name is hallowed when He is loved and obeyed, when men live righteously and speak of Him with love and reverence. All

that worship means, reverence, adoration, and holy awe, is involved in this address. We are to call Him Father, but to remember that He is a holy Father, and that His name is a holy name.

4. *For the coming kingdom.** Our next solicitude is for the kingdom, the reign of God among men. For His kingdom to come means the subjection of the lives of men to His sway. It means for our own souls to be dominated by the will and purpose of God. To establish His kingdom means the breaking down of the power of Satan, the destruction of evil and the building up of righteousness. This should concern us more than any merely personal benefit. It means that men and women shall be new creations in Christ Jesus, that they shall be delivered from the bondage of sin, and the will of God be made regnant in their lives, rather than that we shall have the luxuries, or even the necessities of life. It should mean more to us that God should reign in holiness, that evil shall be put down than the attainment of any personal ambition.

*EDITOR'S NOTE.—Our author in his treatment of the petition in the Lord's Prayer, "Thy kingdom come," almost entirely omits reference to the kingly work of Jesus Christ, the manifestations being solely those that are secured in the ordinary experience of the Christian who professes to be actuated by kingdom principles. But, in the view of the editor of these notes, the prayer for the coming of the kingdom involves the prayer for the coming of the King Himself, who will reign personally. The breaking of the power of Satan can only come through the power of one greater than Satan, even Jesus Christ.

The vision of the author—a world redeemed and "brought under the dominion of a conquering Christ," together with the overthrow of "Satan and all the forces that make for evil," would necessarily involve the manifestation of divine power not yet realized.

The domination of kingdom principles in the Christian is a proper thought, and unless those principles are actuating him, he has little claim to be called a Christian. But that which is suggested in this petition of the Lord's Prayer is something that is not only an intimation of the existence of such principles, but stretches out to the coming of the King Himself, who will not only enable His followers to have victory over individual, spiritual enemies, but will mean the overthrow of the kingdom of Satan, something quite complete and permanent, as compared with any present day victory over individual sins. Kingdom truth must involve the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ as a King to set up His throne and become a victor over all enemies.

The clause, "Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven," sets forth the full meaning of the coming of His kingdom. It means that the will of God shall become the law of life to the inhabitants of this world, as it is to the saints and angels in heaven. What an ideal this prayer inspires! Men or women who pray in the spirit of it have ever before them a heavenly vision. They are looking for a world redeemed, made free from sin, and brought under the dominion of the conquering Christ. They see by faith the complete overthrow of Satan and all the forces that make for evil. The full concept of this prayer is a world without sin and without shame, a creation without a rebellious heart or a blighted life. It is the holy ideal of a world from which the devil is an everlasting exile, where death is a stranger, and perfect love is the law of an endless life. This part of the prayer is also a cry for the incoming of the might of God. Any one who dreams this dream will also see that the kingdom can only come when we are "mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds." The task is too big for us and we cry for the kingdom to come by a power above our own.

To pray this prayer rightly is a searching matter. One must be willing for the will of God to be done in his own life. It is worse than folly to pray, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth," when the kingdom of one's own heart is in revolt, and the little bit of the earth which is the domain of his own soul is not subject to the law of Christ. This prayer demands that the will of God shall be supreme in our own lives, subduing every desire of the flesh and every ambition of the will to His own divine ends. The one who shall pray every day in the spirit and understanding of this teaching will grow into Christly bigness of soul, and into fit citizenship of the kingdom for which he prays.

5. *Daily bread.* "Give us this day our daily bread." This is the only request for a purely physical blessing in the entire prayer. It is as if the Lord would have us understand that our bodily needs are subject to the divine care, and at the same time show us the exalted superiority of the moral and the spiritual. Our Father is concerned about all our needs, even the simplest, and our bodies need food day by day. But we are not to ask for wealth or boundless store, simply that our Father furnish our daily needs. There is no limit when we pray for the reign of holiness and the triumph of our Lord; that part of the prayer is infinite in its sweep. Bread belongs to the passing and the temporal; we need it today, we may not need it tomorrow. Our Lord exalts the spiritual above the material, the eternal beyond the temporal, and makes doing the will of God the chief aim of all prayer.

6. *The Christan plea for forgiveness.* "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." Here is one of the unique, outstanding sentences of this prayer. Here is the place that calls for more self-crucifixion, for many of us, than any other word in it. The Master knew poor, weak, twisted, human nature, and He also knew that God could not enter into fellowship with a soul that harbored a grudge, or cherished hate and resentment over some injury. There is nothing which more fully probes a human soul to the depths, than to look a flagrant wrong squarely in the face, and at the same time, undertake to tear from the heart the desire to see the one who has wronged us suffer what we feel is due his injustice. But once we have succeeded in so doing, there comes a mellowness of spirit, a tenderness of heart, a humility of soul, that no other human experience will bring. Note that we do not promise God that we will forgive others, as He

forgives us, but we ask Him to forgive, even as we have forgiven. Those who have really tried to pray this prayer, know how keen is the divine surgeon's knife, and how deeply it probes after our sin.

7. *Deliverance from temptation and from the evil one.* Jesus knew better than any of us just how weak we are against the temptations that come from the evil one, so He taught us not only to ask for forgiveness for the past, but also for strength to avoid sin in the future. This is not a prayer that God shall never make trial of us as He did with Abraham and Job. The trials that came to them were not temptations to sin. God did not place some wrong thing before them as an inducement to evil, but made them pass through such ordeals as tested their moral fiber and the strength of their faith in Him. We are to pray to be delivered from the assaults which have their source in the author of all evil. The testing which comes from God has as its end our good. The seductions of the devil have as their aim, our fall into sin and all possible moral injury. In this prayer our Lord warns us that the enemy is both wiser and stronger than we are, and that we ought to cry continually unto Him who is able to deliver us. Those who would belittle the power of the tempter, or deny his personality, may well ponder the words of this prayer as given by our Lord.

This closes the petitions of this remarkable prayer. What we have said about it is just an effort to make plain some of the things Jesus would have us think about when we come to pray, and what ought to be first in the prayer life of His people.

III. *Persistence in prayer.* Jesus taught us to pray all the way through, and gave us two great illustrations recorded in the eleventh and eighteenth chapters of Luke.

The man who wanted to borrow bread at midnight is a striking example of the spirit that Jesus desires to inculcate. The borrower is in dire need, he is very much in earnest and will not take "No" for an answer. Jesus says when you pray, be just as earnest, just as persevering as this man was. You need the blessing of God much more than he needed his three loaves. You are seeking something that means more than bread, and just as the importunity of the borrower finally wins out, so the soul that is set upon finding God will command His respect and be heard.

God has no time for lukewarm pleas, for easy-going, half-hearted prayers. If the sense of need is not great, if you forget about the matter before the day is over, God will pay little heed to your prayer. But if you have something vital at issue, if you are willing to give time and effort, and press your claims home to a finish, God will listen. The man who is willing to quit, or who can quit, is not in the condition of mind and heart to appreciate the favor of God. The soul that counts it the biggest privilege on earth to know God, that seeks for Him and His blessings as men seek for silver and gold, will not only be rewarded, but will be fitted to estimate rightly what it receives.

Jesus then adds, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened" (Luke 11:9, 10). This is not the easy passage that some people think it is. It does not mean that all you have to do is to ask for something and receive it, or to knock and the door flies open. It refers to the life which is one continual search after God, a constant seeking, a daily

asking, a habitual knocking. It means that you must want that which lies behind that closed door badly enough to knock with unshaken persistence. We must desire that answer beyond all else that life has to offer. Jesus means to say that to such knocking the door will open, to seeking of that sort will come the answer that makes life full and rich.

The parable found in the eighteenth chapter of Luke is still more striking, as it represents a case where the delayed answer is misunderstood. The suppliant is set forth under the figure of a poor widow seeking vindication and protection from an unjust judge. The judge is the perfect embodiment of heartless wickedness. No more complete portrait of utter depravity was ever drawn than Jesus sketched in that one terse sentence, "Which feared not God, neither regarded man." Just one stroke of the Master Artist's brush, and the cold, heartless man stands before us; one who regards not suffering humanity, nor fears the coming judgments of God.

The feeble, insignificant petitioner was scorned, no heed was given. But Jesus said that she continued to press her plea for justice until in absolute selfishness, and for no other reason, the judge granted her request. "Though I fear not God, nor regard man; yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me." The argument is, If a man like that can be moved to do what means nothing to him, will not God hear the continual cry of His people whom He loves with a boundless compassion?

There are long periods when the prayers of the church, as well as those of the individual Christian, seem unanswered. There are long days of darkness, sometimes years of wearisome waiting, while countless petitions as-

cend to a heaven that seems deaf and empty. This is the time about which Jesus speaks. He says, "Cry on, God will hear; He is not heartless, neither has He forgotten."

This parable is for the time when faith has staggered, and the heart has grown sick with waiting. But we must remember that the longest delay to us, may be right "speedily" in the plans of God. Alexander Maclaren says, "Heaven's clock does not beat in the same note with our little chronometers." Jesus teaches us to pray on, that we must not quit, we must not doubt; God knows when to answer, He knows the best time and the most fitting place. Our Father is far kinder than the householder awakened at midnight. He is all that the heartless judge is not, and He knows all about our dire need, and will answer in wisdom and love. We can in all confidence leave the question of *when* and *where* to Him. Of one thing we may be sure, *He will answer.* The very heavens may fall, the sun may be veiled in sackcloth, and every star go out, but *He will answer.* Prayer that is worthy the name will not become discouraged, it will not surrender the field. That which faints and quits is not prayer in the vocabulary of Jesus.

Our Lord taught us how to pray by His matchless example. He prayed in the constant routine of life, and communion with the Father was His strength and solace in every great life crisis. At His baptism, when He chose the twelve, in the Gethsemane struggle, and in the conflict of the cross, He prayed. He taught us the transparent simplicity which must dominate us in the holy hours of communion and intercession. He set forth that we must come without bitterness or malice in our hearts, forgiving even as we hope to be forgiven. He said that our prayers must be constant, that life must be a perpetual seeking, a ceaseless knocking, one continuous asking. His wonderful par-

ables showed that there must be no fainting or wavering; that in the darkest hours, we must, like the poor widow, plead our cause and wait the answer of one who avenges speedily.

Chapter IX

JESUS AND PREVAILING PRAYER

THAT God has commanded us to pray, goes without controversy with every Bible student. That He has promised to do things for those who pray, that He will not do for those who do not pray, is equally evident.

It then becomes a matter of interest to all of us to know if there are any conditions attached to His promises, if there are any prayer laws which must be obeyed. If there are such conditions, to know them is more important than almost anything which we could imagine. The knowledge of the laws which govern the preservation of health, that tell us how to keep our bodies vigorous and strong are of great value. To know the rules of gaining wealth, or achieving power and influence, mean much to men. But these things are not to be mentioned along with the privilege of coming into the secret place of the Most High, and making an eternal alliance with the forces of Omnipotence. Of all the holy arts that of intercession is the most heavenly, and the power of prevailing in prayer is one of the gifts to be coveted most of all by growing saints. The enduement of the herald who leads the lost to the foot of the cross, or stirs the hearts of saints to deeds of Christly sacrifice, is one that angels might well covet. The work of the teacher who unfolds the treasures of heavenly truth and pours their richness continually into the lives of others, and the power to gather wealth and make worthy gifts to our Lord's treasury, are glorious achievements; but all of these fall short of the measureless power of prevailing prayer.

Every victorious conquest of the Redeemer's kingdom, every great stride in its triumphant march, every great revival when the church has mounted up on wings like the eagle, have had their beginnings in some secret shrine where interceding souls have waited before the mercy seat.

All real prayer has as its basis a belief in a God who responds to the quest of the human soul. "For he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Heb. 11:6). We find God by our hearts and not by our intellects, and the first condition of entering into His fellowship, is a faith not only that God is, but that He will be found of the soul that honestly and persistently seeks for Him. God is not found by those who look for Him in the spirit of cold curiosity, or those who simply desire to extend the range of their intellectual conquests. This is the reason why many philosophers and scientists have been unable to come into any clear conception of God. It was to men of this type, that Zophar said: "Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?" (Job 11:7). When a man says in the pride of his intellect, "I will now see if there be any God," he may turn his telescope upon the farthest heavens and count the myriad worlds that wander in the blue abyss, he may peer among the atoms, and divide and subdivide the electrons, but the greatest thing in the universe will still be hidden from his eyes.

The laws of logic, the theories of philosophy, the investigations of science, all have their place and are of great value, but they are not milestones on the road into fellowship with God. The man who can say with the Hebrew psalmist, "My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God?" is more nearly

on the road to His presence. The humble man who with simple and sincere desire reaches out after God will find Him, while the philosopher is groping amid the shadows of his theories, and the scientist is bewildered among the problems of his laboratory.

Let us briefly notice some of the things which Jesus mentioned as conditions of prevailing prayer.

I. *In His name.* "And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son" (John 14:13). Jesus is the only way into the heart of God. In every possible relation of life He is the revealer of the Father. Apart from Him we could never have had an adequate knowledge of God. It is through His blood that we meet God in loving reconciliation at the mercy seat. He is our advocate and intercessor in heaven, and through His name *only* we may claim the answer to our prayers. "In my name." If Jesus were other than what He is, that would have been an exceeding boastful and egotistic statement; but being what He is, it is the simple expression of a wonderful truth. We are prone to think of other reasons and other grounds on which to press our claims before God. Sometimes we base our expectations upon our oft coming; at other times we say in our hearts that we have been faithful to certain obligations of Christian duty, and therefore God ought to hear us; or, we build our hopes upon the fact that faithful Christian men and women have joined their prayers with ours, and argue that for those reasons God will hear us. But our Lord says that it must be in His name. We are unworthy; He is deserving of all things. We have of ourselves no right to the ear of the Father. Christ has His legitimate place at the right hand of the Father, and the Father hears Him alway. We must ever remember

that Jesus is the one and only way to the Father, and that no other path can be found into the favor of God.

We know little of God, save as we see His glory in the face of Christ Jesus. We know the blessedness of pardon and the sweetness of reconciliation only through His cross. He is our high-priestly Intercessor, no veil intervenes, and we can come boldly through His name. Every prayer that is accepted must be countersigned by our everlasting High Priest, who ever liveth to make intercession for us. Jesus Christ must be the all in all of every prayer that prevails at the mercy seat.

II. *The glory of the Father.* "That the Father may be glorified in the Son." This goes a little deeper and inquires into the motives of our prayers. God not only demands that we shall cast away all claims to His favor, except the redeeming work of His Son, but He turns the light into the innermost recesses of our being, and asks each of us, "Why do you want this thing? What is the real purpose back of your prayer?" By one stroke He cuts out of the way all selfish aims and ends. This is in line with that wonderful prayer which we studied. God's name, God's kingdom, God's glory must ever be first. Here God lifts the prayer which He will answer into harmony with His holy will and eternal purposes. We must ask ourselves the question, "Will the thing which I am asking make for holiness? Will it advance His kingdom among men?" This is the touchstone by which our petitions will be tried. Many things which we will ask may not be wrong of themselves, they may be good and desirable things, but the motive behind them will not always endure the searching light of the words, "that the Father may be glorified in the Son." So far as this world is concerned, the Father is only glorified through the Son. God is glori-

fied when sin is taken away and sinners are reconciled by the blood of Jesus, when evil is overthrown and holiness exalted in the triumphs of His gospel. When a child of God would seek the blessings that come through answered prayer, he must test all his requests by this crucial and trying statement.

The objects which we desire most earnestly for ourselves and our children are, in the essential motive, often selfish. We can pray for the salvation of the lost, and be moved by our friendship for them, rather than the glory of God. We may be making the joy that would come to us the first reason, rather than the fact that their salvation would be to the glory of His redeeming grace. God and not our friends, His glory and not our joy, must be first when we pray for the salvation of men. When we ask for the growth of the kingdom, for the kindling of revival fires, for the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, we must not think of these things primarily as they relate to ourselves and our happiness, we must think of them as they relate to the glory and exaltation of our blessed Lord. We must learn to say: "Father, if this thing will enable me to better serve Thee, and do more for the cause of Thy love, give it; if not, I would rather suffer disappointment than hinder thy cause." When we pray after this fashion, we put ourselves in line with God, and ally our wills to the will of the Infinite.

"That the Father may be glorified." It was in this spirit that Elijah prayed, and God gave him the keys of the treasures of the rain, and the winds of God blew according to his will. In the same manner Moses prayed until the hands of Omnipotence were held by His own unbreakable promise on the lips of a mortal man.

In Jesus' name—no other name will avail, not even that

of the most saintly man or woman of all time. In Jesus' name—not of our good works, not of our long years of service, only the name of Jesus. That name bears with it the arguments of Gethsemane and its bloody sweat, and the plea of Calvary with its grim and gory cross. When a child of God approaches the throne of grace with the name of Jesus upon his lips and the glory of the Father as the supreme desire of his heart, he wields the nearest to infinite power that ever comes within the grasp of mortal man.

III. *The twofold abiding.* "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you" (John 15:7). This promise is stupendous, it is staggering and overwhelming in its immensity. "What ye will," and "it shall be done" are more than we can grasp.

"If ye abide in me." Jesus had just been talking about the living union of the vine and the branches, and had told them that there must be a similar union between Him and His followers. Just as the life went out from the vine into the branches, even so their life came from Him. That was His picture of the normal relation between a disciple and his Lord. He warned them against losing this close and intimate relationship. One may not have forsaken or denied his Lord, but he may have lost the living touch; the pulse throb of vital life, the delicate response of soul, are gone. Sometimes a telephone gets out of order. It has not been taken out of the house and is still a part of the system, but something is wrong. The central does not answer, the connection has been interrupted. Just in the same way it may happen between a Christian and his Lord. Jesus says, "If you keep the connection working, if there is a vital, instant response between your life and mine, this promise belongs to you." This is the first con-

dition of this almost unthinkable promise. "Abide in me," means feeling the heart throb of infinite love. Abiding there does not mean just running in now and then, but making that abiding communion our normal habit of life. Let that be your spiritual home, live close to His heart, listen to His voice, obey Him with joyous willingness, and you have fulfilled the first part of this promise.

"And my words abide in you." Just what did Jesus mean by this? He did not mean that His written word, the Bible, should all be lodged in our memories, for wonderful as that would be, to many that would be impossible. He does not mean that we should never forget anything that He has said; that would make His promise contingent upon a good memory. Is not this rather the meaning of His words, that in our hearts, in that part of us that directs our whole nature, we shall recognize and enthrone His authority, and own the Lordship of His will? This signifies that His will, as made known to us in His Word, shall be final to us about any step in life, concerning any problem that presents itself. We must not only seek to know His will, but when known, that will must be the continuous, abiding law of our lives. We must be willing to surrender to His sway our opinions, our desires, our ambitions, and surrender any of them that are found in conflict with His words. This means doing His will for the simple joy of doing it. To obey Him must be the great thing of life. What He says about anything must be the final court of appeal, the supreme authority for our consciences.

Jesus means to say, that when we make His will the arbiter in that part of our nature where choices are made, and the balances of decision swing back and forth in the secret springs of our being where the will is king, this priceless treasure belongs to us. When we are resting in

His love, rejoicing in His fellowship; when we have made His words, the revelation of His will, a living, binding, compelling authority dwelling in our souls, we can enter into the privileges of this matchless priesthood.

These conditions do not call for perfection, they impose no impossible demands. They do call for hearts that aspire to perfection, and hunger to render perfect obedience to the will of our Lord. The prerogatives set forth in this promise do not belong to any royal aristocracy; they are not the birth-right of any select few; but are within the grasp of any child of God who honestly desires them.

Let us look this promise over again. Its very bigness baffles us; the exceeding graciousness of it makes us skeptical. Does God surrender to a human will? Yes, when that will is moulded to conform in purpose and desire to His own. Does He put the keys of the treasures of infinity into the hands of mortal men? Yes, when He can trust the men.

But someone will say, "Is there not danger of the abuse of such liberality?" Not in the least under the conditions named. Any one who lives in touch with his Lord, whose will is surrendered to the divine will, can never abuse God's bounty. That person will want only such things as are in harmony with the designs and plans of the Master, and when he is in doubt he will submit his will to the divine guidance and allow the Master to choose for Him. The spirit that would squander the exceeding riches of grace, as here revealed, could never have this promise. All danger is guarded against in the conditions imposed.

It might be said, "Then the promise means nothing, as the will of God will be carried out any way." That the

ultimate purpose of God will triumph goes without saying, but within the scope and bounds of His working there are blessings, gifts and privileges, about which most of His children know nothing. There is a place in the divine plan for the open heart that will be used willingly in these great plans and purposes. To such hearts there are individual blessings, that make for peace, fulness of life, and development of character. The souls which enter into this heritage of power will find strength for service, and victory over sin within and the forces of evil about them. They will have potency for great achievements in the fields of His conquering grace, and for great victories in world conquest. The cause of God waits for those whom He can use, for surrendered wills, for the hearts that erect no barriers to the incoming of His might.

In this promise is the open door to princely conquest. Here is the strength in which we can conquer. The terms are not difficult if we really want what they offer. Our Lord waits and pleads to come into that fellowship with each of His children which this passage demands. It is possible to abide in Him, and this abiding is a joyous experience which is within the reach of every redeemed soul. We will not be perfect, we will sometimes stumble and err, but we can say and say it with all sincerity: "Thy will, O Master, be done in me and by me." And when a child of God enthrones his Lord in the very seat of life, he will have pressed into his hands the keys which open the coffers of divine mercy, and unlock the floodgates of measureless power. Glorious promise! Inestimable heritage! A dowry beyond computation belonging to this holy sonship! Blessed are they who have eyes to see, and the bigness of heart and courage of soul to enter into its glory.

IV. *Just two of you.* "Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree upon earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:19, 20). This is one of the most challenging sentences that Jesus ever uttered. We may well pause and wait until the full import of this statement shall begin to dawn upon us. Our Lord said, "If two of you"—not a thousand, not a hundred, not ten, but the smallest number which it is possible to gather together. And if that two shall have agreement of soul, unanimity of purpose, anything which they shall ask, shall be done.

Jesus had just been telling His disciples how to proceed in cases of personal trouble between members of a church, and had told them that whatever they did according to His instructions would be ratified in heaven. He followed that statement with this wonderful promise, and linked with it the assertion that the smallest possible gathering of His people shall always have His blessed presence. He makes the affirmation that there will never be a meeting in His name so small that He will not be there. When they meet He is there; He does not have to come; His presence is continual. And when that meeting is held, if only two of them shall agree in their prayers, that which they ask shall be done. This promise is good for any gathering, any place, and at any time.

Let us think about a meeting of that kind. Here are two who have come together in the name of their Lord. He is there, He knows all about the meeting, all about the purposes of their coming, and He knows the desires which burn in their hearts. Their Master hears all that is said, all the songs and prayers, and that heart cry too deep for

words. He is with them in love and sympathy, ready and able to give what they ask. He looks upon those two and says, "If you have perfect agreement in your hearts as you pray, the things for which you ask shall be done for you by my Father." How big must the meeting be? The smallest possible gathering carries with it these measureless possibilities. May we not think of our Lord as being in the assembly of His people, watching to see if two shall in their secret hearts agree with Him and with each other, and waiting to fulfil His promise. The Greek word used here is the same that is used to denote the tuning of musical instruments. He means that the two who pray must not only be in harmony with one another, but also with the great plans and purposes of God. They must be one with Him in the building of the kingdom. Their attitude toward the souls of men must be like that of the Great Shepherd as He seeks for the sheep that was lost. Jesus says when such agreement is found, "it shall be done." And behind that "shall" He puts the arm that lifts the pillars of the skies, and the hand that lighted a million stars to circle the sapphire heavens. Earth has never looked upon a greater source of power than two children of God upon their knees, their hearts aglow with holy desire, pouring out their petitions before an answering God. We are trembling like weaklings, when we ought to be traveling in the greatness of this strength. We are pauper souls, when we ought to be heavenly millionaires, revelling in the exceeding riches of His grace.

Our Lord knew how slow we would be to pray, so He put in His Word these exceeding great and precious promises to beckon us to our knees where He may speak with us. Many of us pray after a fashion, but few of us prevail in prayer. There are countless petitions full of eloquent

words, apt phrases and solemn tones, which impress the human listener, but fall short of the *one* ear that prayer ought to reach.

Nevertheless, prevailing prayer is possible. Jesus said so. It is the only kind of prayer God wants. He is waiting for hearts that He can bless, for souls that are ready to be filled with power. There is a phrase the writer used to hear as he listened to the fathers pray in the old country church, "Thou art more willing to give than we are to receive." Those simple men were wiser than they knew, and stated in their unstudied way a wondrous truth. God is vitally interested in all that pertains to His children and His cause. He is more concerned that we shall be good than we could possibly be. He was interested in our salvation long before our hearts ever melted in repentence or cried for mercy. He is more anxious about the lost one than the best of those who pray for him. He is more careful about that revival than the pastor on his knees in his study, or the earnest company who gather at the prayer meeting. All the things that ought to be, lie continually upon His great loving heart. Why then does He wait? For the reason that He works through men and women, and can only use those who are able to pray after this fashion. Science teaches us that there are unlimited reservoirs of electric energy all about us, but that this force can only be made available by appliances that are fitted to receive and conduct its tremendous power. Even so, God is looking for those among His people who will become channels for the power which He has provided for the salvation of men and the progress of His cause. Those who pray, who continue in prayer, who learn to pray as Jesus taught, become the living wires that carry the fervid currents of this power into the lives of men.

"There were only two or three of us,
  Who came to the place of prayer;
Came in the teeth of a blinding storm,
  But for that we did not care.
Since after our hymns of praise had risen,
  And our earnest prayers were said,
The Master Himself was present,
  And gave us the living bread.

"Each of us felt the load of sin
  From weary shoulders fall;
Each of us dropped the load of care,
  And grief that was like a pall.
And over our spirits a blessed calm
  Swept in from the jasper sea,
And strength was ours for the joy and strife
  In days that were to be.

"It was only a handful that gathered
  Into the little place of prayer;
Outside was the struggle, pain and sin,
  But the Lord Himself was there.
He came to redeem the pledge He gave
  Wherever His loved ones be,
To stand Himself in the midst of them
  Tho' they count but two or three."

Chapter X

AN EMERGENCY CALL

WE are living in an emergency hour. Those who do not realize this have not studied the times carefully. Jesus reproached the men who claimed to be the religious leaders of His day because they were able to foretell the condition of the weather, but were unable to read the signs of the times.

Before we offer a remedy, we should know at least some of the symptoms of the disease we would heal. Let us note briefly some of the things which constitute the emergency.

I. *There is a weakening of the consciousness of sin on the part of both the church and the world.*

Sin has ceased to be exceeding sinful, even to those who call themselves Christians. Such a thing as a deep, pungent conviction of sin is almost unknown at the present time. This is not because men have stopped sinning, or because of any change in its essential character. There are some forms of disease, in which the most alarming symptoms are the lack of any sort of pain or concern on the part of the patient. The present-day religious condition is marked by the same indications. There is just as much guilt in the sin of our day, as in that of any age of human history. The lack of any deep consciousness of the fact denotes a deadening, a paralysis of the moral faculties, which bodes ill to our generation. It is evident to those who study the facts, that we have an abundance of crime of the lowest and most revolting forms.

The alarming thing is the seeming lack of any positive reaction against it.

When you know the attitude of an individual toward sin, you will also know his position with reference to every essential truth of evangelical faith. And what is true of an individual is also true of society in the aggregate. There will be no true repentance, no seeking forgiveness, no hunger after righteousness, until men learn the real guilt and doom of sin. It is only when we find out how sick we are that we call for the Great Physician.

II. *There is indifference to the claims of Christ and His cause upon the part of vast numbers of church members.*

Ask any pastor who has a deep concern about the spiritual life of his people, attend the mid-week prayer meetings of the churches, attempt to enlist any large number of church members in any real, definite form of Christian service, and you will learn what this means. You will find in the average town many times the number of professed Christians at the show as you will find gathered at the house of prayer; and you will find them far more ready with frivolous excuses, than with willingness to undertake any work for the Master. Such terms as self-denial and sacrifice are meaningless to the vast majority of church members.

Many join the churches because it seems the proper thing to do, but they have no idea of assuming responsibility, or making any sort of connection between religion and life. Hosts of them are of "the earth, earthy," and live only to the flesh that they may fulfil its desires. Such things are too well known to call for proof. Those who will take this call seriously, already realize the truth of these statements.

III. *There is the lowering of moral standards.*

The church is being conformed to the world rather than being transformed by the renewing of the mind, thus reversing the order of the apostolic exhortation. Things are tolerated, sometimes smiled upon, which were frowned upon a generation ago. Lax standards of sex morality, the loose and easy way in which marriage vows are treated, the silly talk and foolish parade of such theories as companionate marriage, the support and approval of filthy screen scenes, and the floods of vile literature which pollute our news stands, all cry aloud that the bars have been let down. Little by little the Sabbath is being destroyed, and its holy hours of quiet worship are becoming things of the past. Decency and modesty are objects of derision upon the part of the flabby-thinking, loose-living crowd who make up much of the social life of today. Some people, who are measuring by their own lowered moral sense, see no danger in many of the things mentioned, but they are bringing bitter heartaches to those who hold that the Ten Commandments are not out of date, and who still believe in the morality of the Sermon on the Mount.

IV. *There is a dearth of passion for souls.*

Christianity has always gone forward with mighty strides when those who professed it have been animated by an intense desire to save the lost. But the present is not a time of deep religious experiences. It is not just the proper thing to be much concerned about other people. We are living in a day when the things of eternity do not occupy very much of the time of the average church member. We are not thinking about men and women in terms of their eternal destiny. Death, judgment, heaven and hell, are not positive facts in the minds of many who would count themselves factors in religious life. Burning zeal, fervent en-

thusiasm, earnest prayers and stirring exhortations, are considered just a bit old fashioned; and are regarded as marks of a low mentality and lack of culture, by many who hold high seats in the modern synagogues.

V. *There is the decay of missionary zeal.*

One of the appalling facts to those who think seriously is the decline of the missionary spirit. The boards of nearly all the evangelical denominations are struggling with heavy debts. The receipts for missions are falling off at a time when Christian people have more money than at any period in history. Nineteen bodies, comprising a majority of the evangelical churches, recently showed a falling off in contributions. And those which showed an increase did not make any unusual gains. The people who compose our churches are not less liberal, but they are giving their money for purposes other than sending the gospel into all the world. The same religious bodies whose contributions for world missions decreased, gave many millions more for home expenses than they did two years previous. Missionary zeal and an ardent desire for the souls of men are Siamese twins, one cannot live without the other. No sort of manipulation of machinery or improvement in methods is going to restore vigor to our efforts for world evangelization. The trouble is deeper and more basal than these things. Either we must have a renewal of the Spirit that made the church of the early centuries a dauntless army of evangels, or we must be content with a dying form of missionary work that is more interested in sanitation, education, and improved methods of agriculture, than in leading men to Christ.

VI. *There is the loss of a positive faith in the essential truths of our religion.*

Of course there are many who still hold with great tenacity all the basal things of New Testament faith, but every one knows that the foundations have been forsaken in many, many places. This defection is found in both pulpit and pew, as is evident to those who try to keep abreast of modern thinking. Christianity as revealed in the New Testament is an exclusive religion and declares that there is "none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." We hear upon every hand that all religions are simply the search of the human soul after God, and so we must look for the good in all of them. Christ has become to thousands of professed Christians simply a better Gautama, and probably not better than he for the Eastern peoples. The mighty doctrines of the essential deity and sinless life of Jesus, of substitutionary atonement, regeneration by the Holy Spirit, judgment to come, heaven and hell, no longer hold millions of church members. Effective evangelism will never be born out of the vagaries of new theology, or from the doubts and negations of those who seek a kindred origin for all religions. Either Christ is the only way to God, or He is not the way anywhere.

Great zeal comes from conquering faith, from rock-ribbed convictions. Flaming crusaders are not the product of vain speculations and uncertainties. There was no doubt in the minds of Peter and his comrades on the day of Pentecost. Their souls were ablaze with the absolute certainty of the Lordship and saving power of the risen Christ. "For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." The Roman empire was not overturned by guesses and interrogation points. The martyrs who glutted the wild beasts, and whose burning bodies lighted the gardens of Nero, had something more than a

hypothesis or a theory. The men and women who through the dark ages braved the wrath of an apostate church, fed their souls upon the "Thus saith the Lord" of the living Word. The revivals led by such men as Edwards, Whitefield and Finney did not spring from preaching filled with nebulous uncertainties. There was no twilight zone where doubt and unbelief were mingled. These men proclaimed the essential truths of a dynamic gospel with an absolute faith that wrought epochal results. Evangelism and missions are twin children of the gospel of the New Testament. If Christ is not the only way to God, if men are not eternally lost without His saving power, they are the most stupendous pieces of folly the world has ever seen. When a positive faith in the inherent truths of the New Testament wanes, both evangelism and missions die.

VII. *There is the tremendous effort that modern rationalism is making to destroy faith in the supernatural.*

Our religion is a supernatural religion. The writer is not in the least afraid of that word. Our God is bigger than what we call nature, He is above, and was before nature. Everything that is, came from His creative power. Our Christian faith is a revelation from the God who is greater than all and over all. When you destroy this, you destroy the Christianity of the New Testament.

Some of us do not realize the magnitude of the effort that is being put forth, or the progress that is being made. The poison may be found in many text books that are being taught to our children in the high schools. It is doing its deadly work in most colleges and universities, save those guarded with vigilance by religious bodies. The insidious venom is being poured forth in streams of books, more numerous than the frogs of Egypt, and far more pestiferous.

This teaching is sedulously advocated in most of the papers and magazines that come into our homes. It is difficult to find a prominent magazine, which does not have, during the year, articles in which some phase of rationalistic philosophy is set forth by one of its masters. This is often so adroitly done, that very many are not aware of the thing that is being accomplished. But poison, disguised as to color and taste, is poison still. These writers are exceedingly dexterous in the use of the covert sneer, and the air of benign pity which mildly hints at the pathetic ignorance and pitiable narrowness of those who do not accept their illuminating theories, which they sagely tell us are the assured results of the most profound scholarship. All these efforts are bearing fruit, and the crop is hourly increasing. Worst of all, some mis-named schools of theology have joined the procession, and are "out-Heroding Herod" in the advocacy of the theory that all religion must be rationally explained or rejected. These statements do not need proof, for these things are not being done "in a corner."

If the facts mentioned do not constitute an emergency, some of us have not learned the meaning of the word. Most of the people to whom these words are intended to appeal are already bitterly aware of the truth of all that has been said. That for which those who love the old Book are looking is a remedy. They are longing for the sound of the "going in the tops of the mulberry trees," that presages victory.

The remedy is within our reach. There has never been an hour when the hosts of evil were more audacious than right now. They are crying as in the days of the Psalmist, "Where is their God?" The forces which have arrayed themselves against our faith are not going to yield to easy-

going, or mediocre measures. We need the same power that gave victory to Elijah, the heart-pricking that broke the hearts of three thousand stubborn Jews on the day of Pentecost. We need the same invincible strength that shattered the paganism of Rome and overcame the subtle philosophy of Greece.

We will not win by arguments, nor by the persuasive words of man's wisdom, but by "demonstration of the Spirit and of power." If Christianity is to live, it must have a fresh credential, a new manifestation to this busy, pleasure-loving, materialistic, scientific age, of the power of the resurrected Christ to make new men and women. We must have brought home, both to us and to the world, a renewed conviction of the reality and guilt of sin, and the glorious fact of forgiveness through redeeming grace. This bewildered generation needs to have its eyes opened to the tremendous potency of the unseen and eternal.

Human nature has not changed. The facts of sin and death are just the same. Humanity still weeps by open graves. Sin continues to bear the baneful fruits of degradation and death. The redemption that is in Christ Jesus will still deliver from the dominion and power of sin, and His blood remains the only agency that can take away its guilt. It is not *methods* we are needing but *power*. The situation will not be met by more and better organizations. We have a hundredfold more than our fathers had in the days of victory.

In the second chapter of Joel we find the prophet calling backslidden Israel to repentance, and pointing the way back to God. The words might well have been written for our own day. "Therefore also now, saith the Lord, Turn ye even unto me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your heart,

and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord, your God; for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil.... Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly; gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children and those that suck the breasts; let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber and the bride out of her closet. Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them; wherefore should they say among the people, Where is their God? Then will the Lord be jealous for his land, and pity his people" (Joel 2:12-18). This is a call for a turning to God in deepest sincerity, for a time when hearts shall be broken, and not simply that outward symbols of mourning shall be displayed. Joel's words are a summons to weeping, fasting, and mourning, but these were to be simply the outward manifestations of their sorrow and repentance. The prophets were never much concerned with forms and ceremonies; they dealt with thoughts, deeds, and purposes of the heart. The first marks of revival have always been repentence and amendment of life upon the part of God's wayward children. The fact is there can be no revival without these things.

The prophet declares that the whole land is affected—that there must be radical treatment to remove this deadly infection. He says that a cry should go forth from the center of the religious life of the nation: "Blow the trumpet in Zion." Let the call take on the most serious nature. It is not a gathering for good-fellowship and rejoicing, but for humiliation and self-denial. Getting right with God is the supreme business of the hour; let it be regarded as such.

Bring together the men of influence, the religious leaders; "assemble the elders"—"gather the children"—even the unconscious babes. The summons is so compelling in its appeal that the bridegroom and the bride should leave their honeymoon, and the time of nuptial joy be sacrificed to the imperious demands of the hour. Such was the call of God's prophet to His people in a time of peril. He demands that no business, no pleasure, shall interfere with their seeking the favor of God. Emergencies call for heroic remedies. Great crises demand courageous and unusual action.

When this company has met, what shall occupy them? How shall they proceed? Listen to the old prophet: "Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them; wherefore should they say among the people, Where is their God?"

The meeting is for prayer and supplication. Not for shaping policies, not for enlistment, but for prayer. Prayer is the supreme business of the hour. The situation has gotten beyond the power of man. Both priest and people must fall back upon God. The ministers of God are to lead this prayer-meeting; their tears must be the first to fall, their prayers the first to ascend.

This is a vivid and instructive picture that the inspired artist has drawn, the picture of a penitent people turning to God in the hour of their extremity. Yet the peril of the time of Joel was not greater than ours, and the foes who threatened them no more to be dreaded than those who knock at our gates. The insufficiency of human strength is the same now as then. The time is upon us for gatherings for prayer, meetings in which there shall be no eloquent

speeches, no marshalling of statistics; but instead, tears, sobs, broken hearts, praying that forgets all save the dire need. We need the breath of God, the power that brings victory. We need the willingness for sacrifice, the passion for souls, that the Holy Spirit alone can give.

And do not the preachers need to pray? Are not we the God-appointed leaders of our churches? Have not the fires burned low in our hearts, as well as in the souls of our people? Have we not been depending too much upon our learning, upon our ability to sway the people with eloquent words and cogently stated facts? I would not for one moment take from the ministry one iota of scholarship, or the smallest tithe of learning; I am simply calling attention to a mightier need. Not many of the early apostles were men of learning. They were in the main poorly endowed with human wisdom, but they were mighty to the pulling down of strongholds, and glorious in their conquests for the kingdom. They were strong in the might of the indwelling Spirit, aflame with zeal, and their hearts thrilled with the pulsing experiences of the living presence of the risen Christ. They may not always have been rhetorical, but they had something which schools of rhetoric could not teach. They may have been lacking in scholarly finish, but their words cut and burned, while the polished sentences of the cultured provoked only a passing diversion. They lacked many things which we have, yet all the serried legions of Rome, and all the aesthetic skepticism of Greece, went down before their triumphant march.

"Wherefore should they say among the people, Where is their God?" Boldly and blatantly the pleasure-mad sensualists of today echo that ancient sneer of the forces of iniquity. On every hand the self-intoxicated advocates of the creed which will accept no deity which does not fit

in with their materialistic philosophy, are crying, "Where is their God?" The skepticism of today delights to express itself in a sneering question. Its favorite weapon, especially with the young, is an interrogation point. They insinuate that conservative Christians are simple-minded folk who believe without evidence, and are to be pitied for the credulity which accepts things which will not stand the test of their scientific standards. They look into crucibles, peer among atoms, and gaze into stellar space and say: "We find no God." They delve into the earth, and finger fossil bones, talk learnedly about the length of geologic ages, and exclaim: "We find no evidence of a Creator!" Sin, defiant, lecherous, blasphemous sin, flaunts its shame and cries: "Where is their God?" Proud and boastful sinners say: "Nothing happens to us; we defy His laws, trample upon His precepts, wallow in all the things which you say He has forbidden, and there are no fiery judgments." "Where is He?" In the midst of these things we preach and hold our meetings, but the stream of death is not checked, and all the tides of unbelief and impurity are still running at flood.

What we need is the manifest working of the living God brought home to this careless, shallow, frivolous, God-ignoring age, by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. He alone can bring conviction to a day like this; only His illumination can make men see the impending danger of the second death.

Why not gatherings for prayer in all the churches of the land? Why not have meetings where the people who love God and see the peril to His cause shall come together for confession, for prayer and supplication? Ought not the ministry to lead in this confession? Have we not been lukewarm when we ought to have been ablaze for

God and righteousness? Have we not looked complacently upon sin, and failed to sound the alarm as Zion's watchmen? Virulent diseases call for potent remedies, and there are still demons that go out only by prayer and fasting. A time of fasting and prayer would not have a very appealing sound to many in this Laodicean age, but it should not seem unusual or inappropriate for those who are God's anointed leaders in such an hour. Joel says for the ministers of the Lord to weep. He does not mean for them to parade their grief, but that their penitence and distress shall be so real, and their hearts so troubled that they shall be willing for all to know their sorrow and repentance. Besides, tears are mighty on such occasions. Groans are more fitting than shouts, and God "forgetteth not the cry of the humble." Yes, gatherings for prayer, where preachers talk little and pray much, where faces are in the dust, and no one bothers about displaying his ability, or thinks of the chief seats in the synagogue, are the great need of the hour.

It is not a question of the might of the foe, not a matter of the deadness of sinful hearts, nor even of the backslidden condition of the churches. If the people who love God and are troubled about His cause shall pray, pray with earnestness, pray with heart-searchings, pray with agonizing supplications, the desired result will be achieved. Our preachers must pray, pray until they are thrilled with the conscious presence of the living Christ, and then preach with an unshaken faith in the potency of the gospel which they proclaim. Our churches must pray until formalities are forgotten, until their hearts break over a lost world, and until they cannot but speak about the great salvation that is in Christ Jesus. Pray until the things of the world lose their fascination, and the mighty things of life and

death, judgment and eternity, loom large in their thinking. When they have so prayed, they will forget to note how the preacher wore his cravat, or whether he split his infinitives. They will be more concerned that sinners shall be saved than that the service shall be stately, or the music artistic. The way to the mercy seat is open, but the door is not wide enough for all the worldly luggage some of us are carrying. The world will be convicted of sin through the Word of God and the Holy Spirit, when we are convicted of the truth of the message which we proclaim.

Facing an emergency? Yes! Are there mighty foes? Yes, ten thousand times yes! But what does it matter? Our God is not dead. He has not abdicated, nor become indifferent. Our Leader "shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth; and the isles shall wait for his law" (Isa. 42:4). We are His representatives; His churches are the agencies that He will use. He is "the same yesterday, and today, and forever."

Let us forget our numbers. Mere numbers never convicted or saved a sinner in all the tides of time. Let us stop talking about our wealth. Neither the gleam of gold, nor the rustle of bank notes will revive a torpid church, nor arouse a sinner, dead and petrified in his iniquity. Let us stop trusting in our learning. "The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God." Let us turn again to the words of the ancient prophet: "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts."

The laws of prayer are simple, yet inexorable. They may be ignored, but thank God, they can also be obeyed. Let every gathering of God's people be an arena of struggle, like that of Jacob at Jabbok; every meeting of preachers an agony of supplication, like the praying of Daniel for the exiled nation; every secret place of prayer, like the

hour when Moses sought that he might die rather than God should fail or Israel perish; let each of us feel the "great heaviness and continual sorrow" that Paul carried in his heart, and the winds of God will begin to blow. Under such conditions preachers may have less precision of words, but they will have more power of heart. There will be less oratory and more tears; not so much applause, but more penitent sinners; fewer rounded periods, but more rejoicing converts. Our congregations will have less ostentation and display, but more broken and contrite hearts. Criticism will give way to loving co-operation, and cold-hearted formality to a mighty hunger for souls.

The writer of these lines is not a pessimist, but an optimist of the most positive type. He believes that the Christ "who was dead and is alive forever more," is going to "reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet." Concerning the final outcome he has not the shadow of a doubt. Yet he cannot be blind to the perils which confront us. Christianity is not only at the "cross roads," it is fighting for its life, and many of its soldiers are ignoring the real weapons of their warfare.

Yet a crisis is nothing new. All down its history the church of Christ has been beset by overwhelming odds, and just as often the victory has come in the same way. Many of God's children are praying, and many more may be led to pray. Sound the trumpet long and clear, let the call to prayer be heard all over the land! Our preachers and people must pay the price of triumph; they must pay it in prayer, in penitence, in tears, and in renewed consecration. "The Lord God of Elijah," of Paul, of Luther, of Whitefield, of Finney, of Spurgeon, of Moody, still lives. He will hear; He wants to hear. He is waiting for the

people whom He can hear. "Then will the Lord be jealous for his land, and pity his people."

"O God of earth and altar,
  Bow down and hear our cry;
Our earthly rulers falter,
  Our people drift and die;
The walls of gold entomb us,
  The swords of scorn divide;
Take not Thy thunder from us,
  But take away our pride.

"From all that error teaches,
  From lies of tongue and pen;
From all the easy speeches
  That comfort cruel men;
From sale and profanation,
  Of honor and of sword;
From sleep and from damnation,
  Deliver us, good Lord.

"Tie in a living tether
  The priest and prince and thrall;
Bind all our lives together,
  Smite us and save us all
From ire and exultation;
  Aflame with faith and free,
Lift up a living nation,
  A single sword to Thee."

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